

PFLAG



Be Yourself

**Questions and Answers for
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender,
Queer, and Questioning Youth**

If you or a loved one needs immediate assistance, we encourage you to call 988, the Suicide and Crisis Hotline, or seek out help from one of the following, immediately.

The Trevor Project: (866) 488-7386
The leading national organization providing crisis intervention and suicide prevention services to LGBTQ+ young people ages 13-24.

National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: (800) 273-8255 (online chat available)
A national network of local crisis centers that provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Crisis Text Line: Text START to 741-741
A free, 24/7 support for those in crisis. Text from anywhere in the USA to text with a trained Crisis Counselor.

The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline: (888) 843-4564

The GLBT National Youth Talkline (youth serving youth through age 25): (800) 246-7743
Telephone and online private one-to-one chat and email peer-support, as well as factual information and local resources for cities and towns across the United States.

Trans Lifeline: (877) 565-8860
A trans-led organization that connects trans people to the community, support, and resources they need to survive and thrive.

The National Runaway Safeline: 800-RUNAWAY (800-786-2929)
Provides advice and assistance to runaways, including resources,

shelter, transportation, assistance in finding counseling, and transitioning back to home life. NRS frontline staff will also act as advocates and mediators if/as needed.

True Colors United: (212) 461-4401
This organization is working to end homelessness for LGBTQ+ youth and maintains a database of service providers.

Self Abuse Finally Ends (S.A.F.E.): selfinjury.com
Addresses individuals coping with non-suicidal self-injury, including locally based information, support and therapy referrals.

National AIDS Hotline: (800) 342-AIDS / (800) 344-7432 (Spanish) / (800) 243-7889 (TDD)

U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline: (800) 799-7233 (English and Spanish) (800) 787-3224 (TTY)
Provides round-the-clock lifesaving tools and immediate support to enable victims to find safety and live lives free of abuse. Highly trained, experienced advocates offer compassionate support, crisis intervention information and referral services in over 170 languages.

Pride Institute: (800) 547-7433 24/7
Chemical dependency/mental health referral and information hotline for the LGBTQ community.

Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN): (800) 656-HOPE / (800) 810-7440 (TTY)

ABOUT PFLAG

PFLAG is an organization of LGBTQ+ people, parents, families, and allies who work together to create an equitable and inclusive world. We are hundreds of thousands of people and hundreds of chapters from coast to coast who are leading with love to support families, educate allies, and advocate for just, equitable, and inclusive legislation and policies.

Since our founding in 1973, PFLAG works every day to ensure LGBTQ+ people everywhere are safe, celebrated, empowered and loved. Learn more, find support, donate, and take action at [PFLAG.org](https://pflag.org).

Our Mission. To create a caring, just, and affirming world for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them.

Our Vision. An equitable, inclusive world where every LGBTQ+ person is safe, celebrated, empowered, and loved.

About this Publication

Our experiences, expertise, knowledge, and resources are always evolving, so we encourage you to visit our website, as well as check with medical, behavioral health, social services, and other professional providers, or local support groups—including PFLAG chapters—for the most up-to-date information on LGBTQ+ experiences.

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To order this publication, receive a complete listing of PFLAG publications, or obtain information about a PFLAG chapter in your area, visit our website at pflag.org.

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INTRODUCTION

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression are complex concepts and discovering your own unique identity can be confusing. Deciding to come out as LGB or queer—or disclosing yourself as transgender—can be challenging and puzzling, and leave you filled with questions.

Think about it: you're becoming an adult, which can feel both exciting and frustrating, especially when you don't yet have an adult's rights. You're becoming more independent, and your relationship with your parents, guardians, or family members is changing. It's a new experience for them; they're learning to accept that you're not a little child anymore.

Then, suddenly, your peers realize that dating might be fun, and couples start popping up all over school. Soon such relationships might seem like the most important things in the world.

But what if you can't relate? If you're a teen who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, or questioning—or wondering if you are—you may feel unprepared, uninformed, and even excluded.

Maybe your friends and family have talked to you about dating, falling in love, and getting married. But they might not have talked about what happens when two people of the same gender or sex fall in love, or about what you can do when your physical anatomy just doesn't “match up” with how you feel inside. In fact, a lot of what you've heard about LGBTQ+ people might have come from people at school, where terms related to the LGBTQ+ community are sometimes used to harass and insult other people; you may even have experienced this harassment or discrimination within your own family.

Our society and culture—television, movies, music, magazines, books—is dominated by heterosexual and gender-conforming images and messages.

“Realizing that I’m not straight was the least expected thing to happen to me. One night I was journaling, and without thinking, wrote down ‘I’m bisexual.’ Since then, I’ve realized that I don’t really like labeling myself.”

— Anonymous, 16, Cleveland, Ohio



And, while most people your age seem to fit neatly into expected gender roles, you may feel you don’t—or don’t want to.

This publication aims to help you understand yourself and the LGBTQ+ community by answering some of your questions and recommending supportive resources. The questions other youth have asked about being LGBTQ+ shape this publication; we hope it will help you find answers of your own.

Three important points:

One: There is nothing wrong with being LGBTQ+; it’s as normal as being left-handed. It’s just another part of who you are. Everyone has a sexual orientation, a gender identity, and a gender expression.

Two: It takes time to know who you are. It’s okay to be confused, it’s okay to be unsure, and it’s okay to take your time figuring things out. There’s no need to rush the process.

Three: You’re not alone. Right now, there are tens of thousands of out LGBTQ+ youth, and thousands more who are wondering if they are LGBTQ+ too. It may seem hard to imagine, especially if your community isn’t LGBTQ+ friendly.

However, there are ways to reach out to other LGBTQ+ young people. If you call any of the numbers at the back of this book or log on to any of the websites listed, you can reach thousands of other youth who have already gone through, or are currently going through, their own journeys of self-discovery. They are people with whom you can talk openly, compare unique life experiences, and seek advice. PFLAG National even partners on such a program—called Q Chat Space—which is a safe, chat-based space to connect with other youth. You can learn more about that program at qchatspace.org, and find information about other organizations at the back of this publication.

Obviously, we cannot pose or answer every question within these pages, but we hope this publication gives you a place to start. You don't have to be alone when learning about and identifying your sexual orientation or gender identity/ expression. We also encourage you to visit the resources available on our website at pflag.org, including our extensive glossary (pflag.org/glossary). Language evolves, often quickly, and youth are often the ones leading the charge on that evolution.

Our best advice? **Be yourself.** If you are LGBTQ+, you'll soon find that you have the power to shape and define your identity, your story, and the way you choose to express them. While coming out will present you with questions and situations you might not have faced before, there is an opportunity to find great joy, comfort, and even relief in the process of self-discovery.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Crisis, Danger, and Self-Harm

I am in crisis or potential danger, and sometimes think of harming myself. I need help!

The short answer: If you are in crisis or thinking about self-harm or suicide—or in potential imminent danger—you need immediate support. Please turn to the inside front cover of this publication for important contact information to get the help you need.

You are worthy of safety, security, love, friendship, and support. If you feel unsafe, unsure, or like you have nowhere to turn, there are people who can help, so please immediately avail yourself of these resources. Not sure where to start? Contact us directly at love@pflag.org and we can help direct you to the best resource for your situation.



Sexual and Romantic Orientation

How do people become straight, lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or other orientations?

The short answer: Everyone has a sexual or romantic orientation, not just LGBTQ+ people. However, because society is still focused on heteronormativity (the centering of heterosexuality as a norm), most people don't think of being straight as just one possibility of many.

No one really knows for sure how sexual or romantic orientation develop. However, many credible experts believe that sexual orientation is not a choice but rather an innate part of us and of our human condition, like handedness—a concept called the “nature” argument. Others believe that sexual orientation can be influenced by upbringing, cultural influences, and other external factors—the “nurture” argument. And some believe it is a combination of both nature and nurture. Regardless of how our sexual orientation develops, most evidence states that it's not something that can be changed.

The American Psychological Association (APA) is the largest association of psychologists worldwide. In its online Psychology Help Center, which discusses “Sexual orientation, homosexuality and bisexuality,” the APA confirms its stance—declared publicly in 1975—that: “...most people experience little or no sense of choice about their sexual orientation.” The APA goes on to explain that sexual orientation is created by a complicated mixture of genetics, hormones, development, and influences both cultural and social; no single factor solely determines one’s sexual orientation. To read more about health, emotional awareness, and sexuality, visit the APA’s Online Help Center at apa.org/topics/lgbtq/orientation.

I think I might not be straight. How do I know for sure?

The short answer: You’ll know when you know. It could take a while, and it’s OK to remain unsure. There’s no need to rush.

There are hundreds of different ways to realize you are not straight. Some people say that from the time they were very young they just “felt different” or “just knew.” Some didn’t share the same grade-school crushes, and some were more interested in their same-sex or same-gender classmates, while others had little or no interest in sexual or romantic relationships at all.

People who are LGBQ+ often say it took a while to put a name to their feelings. Once they learned what being LGBQ+ was, it started to make sense to think about their own sexual or romantic orientation in those terms. It fit with the feelings they’d had while growing up.

Many don’t begin to think about their orientation until they’re teenagers or adults. This is completely normal. We figure out our identities in our own time—sometimes it takes months, other times it takes decades.

If you think you’re LGBQ+, try not to hide your feelings from yourself. Yes, figuring out who you are can be stressful, emotional, and a little scary—you may not want to deal with it—but taking time to think about how you feel is the first step toward accepting and embracing yourself. Give yourself permission and time to explore your thoughts and feelings.

How can I be sure of my sexual orientation if I’m not sexually active?

The short answer: You don’t need to have sex or be in a romantic relationship to discover who you are. It is the attraction that helps determine sexual and romantic orientation.

It’s important to know that you don’t have to have had a sexual experience to know that you’re lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Most people experience crushes when they are quite young, before they become sexually active. Think about your own past crushes: Your feelings and your emotional and physical attractions will help tell you who you are.

Once I came to terms with being male, I felt so much better. I accepted who I am and immediately wanted others to do the same.

— Anonymous, 15, Jasper, Georgia



I thought LGBTQ+ people act a certain way. If I don't fit the stereotype, am I still LGBTQ+?

The short answer: Ignore the stereotypes. Some people fit them, some people don't.

If you don't fit a common stereotype for an LGBTQ+ person, it doesn't mean you're not really LGBTQ+. There is a wide range of diversity within the community, just as there is throughout every part of society. People use stereotypes to help them understand what to expect from certain groups of people. However, many stereotypes are inaccurate or simply incorrect, stemming from a lack of experience or prejudice. For example, you might hear that gay men aren't strong or athletic. Or that lesbians appear or act more masculine. But these are stereotypes and aren't one-size-fits-all.

Bottom line: Don't worry about stereotypes, and don't let labels define you. There are as many ways to express your identity as there are people in this world. You don't need to prove anything to anybody. Be yourself.

I have a crush on my same-sex best friend. What does this mean?

The short answer: Enjoying intimate experiences—like cuddling, kissing, or holding hands—with someone of the same sex or gender doesn't automatically mean you're not straight, just as enjoying intimate experiences with someone of a different sex or gender doesn't automatically mean that you are.

One might develop crushes on different types of people or identify with different gender roles and expectations throughout their lives; many people have diverse romantic and sexual experiences. Some identities which capture those experiences include bisexual+, biromantic, pansexual, and panromantic (see the PFLAG National glossary at pflag.org/glossary for additional identities and descriptions).

In the past, people have talked about sexuality being on a spectrum or continuum, with “gay” at one end and “straight” at the other. That thinking is shifting, from a binary spectrum to more of a sphere of possibilities, and not just sexual but also romantic.

Again, remember that sexuality and romantic drive develops over time. Don't worry if you aren't sure. Your early years are a time of learning, bit by bit, what works for you, and crushes and experimentation are often part of that process. You don't have to label yourself.

I have a crush on someone at my school. How can I tell if they're LGBTQ+ too?

The short answer: You can't, without asking—which presents its own unique challenges.

It's impossible to know for sure how someone identifies just by looking at them, and we shouldn't assume who people are because of the way they look, dress, or act.

People sometimes joke about having “gaydar,” a “radar” that senses who is LGBTQ+. Figuring out someone's sexual orientation, gender identity, and even gender expression—if they're not completely out—is like figuring out if someone is interested in you: Sometimes you can tell, sometimes you can't. It can be an extremely frustrating and stressful process, but it is part of getting to know the people around you. It takes time and patience.

Asking your friends or theirs won't guarantee an accurate answer. And while you can casually observe them to try to find clues—do they have pro-LGBTQ+ stickers on their backpack or locker? Are they a member of the Gay-Straight or Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA) at your school? —these things mean that they may be LGBTQ+, or they may be a supportive ally. The only way to find out someone's romantic or sexual orientation is to talk to them about it directly. However, it's important to respect another person's privacy. They may not want to talk about it, could be upset that you asked them, or may not be or want to be out. As a rule, be careful when asking someone such a personal question unless you know them very well, and even then, be sensitive to the other person's privacy. Approach them the way you would want to be approached about the subject.



Gender Identity and Gender Expression

What's the difference between sexual orientation, romantic orientation, gender identity, and gender expression?

The short answer: Every person in the world has a sexual orientation, romantic orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. One describes our sexual attractions; one describes our romantic attractions, one describes our internal

feelings or sense of being male, female, some combination of both, or neither; and one describes how we present ourselves outwardly to others.

It's common for people to see the acronym 'LGBTQ+' and think it's all about sex or sexual orientation. But it's not! The 'transgender' part of the acronym represents gender identity and is completely separate from sexual orientation, romantic orientation, gender expression, and sexual behavior.

Many people think that all transgender or gender-nonconforming are LGBTQ. They aren't!

In fact, just as each of us has a sexual orientation and romantic orientation, we all have a gender identity and a way of expressing it. Even cisgender people—that is, people who are not transgender—have a gender identity! Our *gender identity* is how we feel inside about being a girl, a boy, somewhere in between, or neither; our *gender expression* is how we dress and act to express or communicate our gender outwardly (which may or may not correlate with our gender identity); our *sexual orientation* describes to whom we are attracted physically, and our *romantic orientation* describes toward whom we feel romantic feelings. Each of these—sexual orientation, romantic orientation, gender identity, and gender expression—are unique, separate, and everyone has them! To learn more about terms like these, visit our online glossary at pflag.org/glossary.

What does it mean to be transgender?

The short answer: “Transgender” is an umbrella term, often used to refer to anyone whose gender identity (their internal sense of their gender) doesn't line up with their sex assigned at birth (meaning, the sex the doctor assigned them when they were born).

The term 'transgender' is often used as an umbrella term referring to anyone who is not cisgender—that is, anyone who does not identify with their assigned sex, regardless of the reason. That said, just as every cisgender (not transgender) person is different, so is every transgender person. One person's definition of themselves as transgender should not be assumed to be the same for every transgender person, and transitioning (the process—social, legal, and/or medical—one goes through to affirm one's gender identity) is different for each transgender person. There isn't only one way to transition, and each person gets to define that process for themselves.

As you begin to learn more about gender identity and gender expression, you might hear other terms used, such as “transsexual.” Considered by some to be an outdated term, it is sometimes used to refer to those who wish to pursue medical transition such as hormone therapy or gender-affirming surgery. Much like the word “queer,” which has been reclaimed and embraced by some LGBTQ+ people, the term “transsexual” has been similarly embraced by some, whereas others find

Since first realizing three years ago that I am bisexual and coming out to most of my family and friends in the intervening years, I have grown tremendously as a person. I am on my way to living a more authentic life.

— Lauren O., 24, Frisco, Texas



the term to be derogatory or limiting in nature, as it can make some trans people who choose not to medically transition feel as though they are not able to truly embrace themselves as transgender. Each person’s experience is unique and how you choose to define yourself is more than just okay and valid, but deserving of respect, support, love, and celebration.

The words ‘transgender’ and ‘transsexual’ do have one thing in common: they are both adjectives (used to describe someone or something) not nouns (used to identify something). Just as you wouldn’t say someone is “gayed” or “straightened,” so too you wouldn’t say someone is, or has been, “transgendered” or “transed.” Saying “Alice is a person who is transgender” is correct—just like saying “Alice is blonde”—but saying “Alice is transgendered” or “Alice was transed” is not. Using these adjectives as nouns or verbs is offensive—and can imply that someone MADE a person transgender, so avoid using them in those ways.

When do transgender people know they’re transgender?

The short answer: One’s internal sense of gender happens at different times for different people.

Many transgender people remember “feeling different” from their earliest childhood memories. But because of stigma and lack of information, they can struggle for many years to understand what they are experiencing or accept this difference. As more information becomes available, we are seeing transgender people openly expressing their true gender identity at younger ages. That said, people come out in their own time and in their own way. They may choose not to reveal themselves to others long after they discover who they are—or they might not even discover who they are until later in life. There is no one “transgender journey.” Everyone’s story is different, and each is valid.

What is the typical transition process for transgender people?

The short answer: There is no “typical” transition process because “transition” means different things to different transgender people.

Some transgender people have a diagnosis of “gender dysphoria” (as defined by the American Psychological Association) which is required to qualify for medically necessary care such as puberty blockers, hormones, and gender-affirming surgery. This diagnosis can be controversial for some, as it might perpetuate stigma and medicalize what many believe is simply another natural human variation.

Other transgender people never need or desire any type of medical intervention and instead seek only to socially transition, including things like name changes, altering their clothing or appearance, and more. There is also legal transition, which is the process of changing names and gender markers on important legal documents such as a birth certificate, passport, or social security card.

Young people who have not yet reached adolescence engage in social and sometimes legal transition.

The internet in particular is rife with misinformation, disinformation, and myths regarding transition and its many meanings, and we encourage you to seek out accurate and reliable sources of information, such as our publication OUR TRANS LOVED ONES, which goes into much more detail on these issues, and was written specifically for the loved ones of transgender people.

What does it mean to be gender nonconforming and how is that different from identifying as transgender? And what does it mean to be genderqueer?

The short answer: Identifying as transgender versus identifying as gender nonconforming (also called “gender expansive,” but typically only non-LGBTQ+ adults use this term) are two different things. The first relates to one’s gender identity; the latter relates to one’s gender expression.

Gender-nonconforming individuals are those whose gender expression is different from the societal expectations based on their assigned sex at birth. Just as with transgender people, gender nonconforming people may or may not identify as transgender, male, female, both, or neither.

Genderqueer people identify outside of the gender binary of being either a man or a woman. They may think of themselves as both man and woman, neither man nor woman, moving between two genders, or a third gender. There are a variety of terms related to gender identity and gender expression, so we encourage you to visit our glossary at pflag.org/glossary for a full listing of those terms.

Aren't there only two genders?

The short answer: No. In America we tend to recognize only two genders, referred to as the “gender binary”—masculine/man/male and feminine/woman/female. But many cultures recognize more than two, and American culture has by and large also shifted away from the binary.

In India and Bangladesh there is a third gender called “Hijra” that is neither male nor female. The Fa’afafine are a third gender in Samoa. Learn more about how other cultures perceive gender from this interactive map and supplementary materials at pflagnation.al/pbs2smap.

Like our sexual and romantic orientations, our gender identity can also be looked at as spherical in possibilities. There are a whole range of identities to be found, and throughout our lives, we can experience and express our gender in a variety of ways. Our gender expression can change over time as we have new experiences and become aware of new ideas.

Remember, gender is a label created by people. Labels like gender are used to help us figure out what to expect from one another. They aren’t set in stone, and there is no right or wrong gender to have or express.

Aren't there only two sexes?

The short answer: Much as there are a variety of gender identities and ways to express them, so too are there many different sexes, which go far beyond a simple glance at one’s genitalia at birth.

Sex is determined by a wide variety of factors and is not as simple as just an XX or XY chromosome. The entire animal kingdom—humans included—is incredibly diverse when it comes to sex and sex characteristics. The term “intersex” refers to people who are biologically between the medically expected definitions of male and female. This can be through variations in hormones, chromosomes, internal or external genitalia, or any combination of any or all primary and/or secondary sex characteristics. While many intersex people are identified as intersex at birth, many are not. As intersex is about biological sex, it is distinct from gender identity and sexual orientation. An intersex person can be of any gender identity and can also be of any sexual orientation and any romantic orientation.

I think I might be transgender or gender nonconforming. How do I know for sure?

The short answer: You’ll know when you know. It could take a while, and it is okay to remain unsure. There’s no need to rush.

There are hundreds of different ways to realize you are not gender conforming or that you are uncomfortable with your gender or physical sex. Some people say that from the time they were very young they “felt different” or “just knew” they

weren't like their friends, rejecting the stereotypical gender characteristics they were "supposed" to display.

People who are transgender or gender nonconforming often say it took a while to put a name to their feelings—it wasn't until they learned what the terms meant that it made sense to think about their gender identity and/or expression in those terms; it fit with the feelings they'd had while growing up.

Many other people don't begin to figure out their gender identity until they're teenagers or adults. This is completely normal. We figure out our identities in our own time—sometimes it takes months, other times it takes decades.

As with sexuality and romantic identity, some people know their gender identity at an early age, while for others, gender identity develops and changes over time. If you feel that your gender identity does not match up with the "boy" or "girl" label others assume you to have, it is completely normal to explore and learn about other ways to express yourself. Gender identity can be expressed in many ways—referred to as "gender expression"—and young people use clothing, makeup, accessories, and name changes to express outwardly how they feel on the inside. Over time, if they remain consistent in these expressions, they might consider other options as they get older, including puberty blockers, hormones, and more.

Try not to hide your feelings from yourself. Yes, figuring out who you are can be stressful, emotional, and a little scary—you may not want to deal with it—but taking some time alone to think about how you feel is the first step toward accepting yourself. Give yourself permission and time to explore your thoughts, feelings, and emotions.



Mental Health

Is being non-heterosexual a mental disorder?

The short answer: Absolutely not.

The American Psychiatric Association declared in 1973 that homosexuality is not a mental disorder or disease, and the American Psychological Association says that it would be unethical to try to change or "fix" a person's sexual orientation.

Is being transgender a mental disorder?

The short answer: Absolutely not.

Being transgender or gender nonconforming is not a disorder. The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) V, published in 2022, describes the term "gender dysphoria" as "a marked incongruence between one's experienced/

When I was a sophomore in high school, I realized that my attraction to girls was stronger than some ordinary “girl crush.” I didn’t think I could be gay because I am very feminine. I love fashion and makeup, and it was hard for me to push past the stereotypes.

— Rachel, 17, Highland Park, New Jersey



expressed gender and their assigned gender, lasting at least 6 months, as manifested by at least two of the following:

- ♥ A marked incongruence between one’s experienced/expressed gender and primary and/or secondary sex characteristics (or in young adolescents, the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- ♥ A strong desire to be rid of one’s primary and/or secondary sex characteristics because of a marked incongruence with one’s experienced/expressed gender (or in young adolescents, a desire to prevent the development of the anticipated secondary sex characteristics)
- ♥ A strong desire for the primary and/or secondary sex characteristics of the other gender
- ♥ A strong desire to be of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)
- ♥ A strong desire to be treated as the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)
- ♥ A strong conviction that one has the typical feelings and reactions of the other gender (or some alternative gender different from one’s assigned gender)

The DSM-V says that “In order to meet criteria for the diagnosis, the condition must also be associated with clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.” As a result of such distress, those with untreated gender dysphoria have a “significantly increased risk of suffering.” However, gender dysphoria narrows treatment to those who experience distress over their gender incongruity.

Therefore, gender dysphoria isn’t about simply being gender nonconforming. It has to do with the absence or presence of suffering and discomfort a person

might feel if they are unhappy or uncomfortable with their gender identity or incongruity. As documented by empirical and clinical data, there are many transgender and gender-nonconforming people who are very happy and comfortable with their gender identity and don't need or seek treatment. Again, every person's experience is different, and each is valid.

What about “ex-gay” ministries and so-called “reparative therapy”—can they help me?

The short answer: No. Not only do these measures not work, but also, they are likely to harm you. *Every major mainstream medical, psychiatric, and psychological association has denounced this type of so-called therapy.*

Because sexual orientation and gender identity are not chosen, you cannot “change your mind” or “pray the gay away” if you are LGBTQ+. After all, did our straight or cisgender friends make a choice to be straight or cisgender? These measures have been proven to cause serious damage and potentially dire consequences for the patients involved. This doesn't mean that people cannot make choices about their sexual behaviors or gender expressions, but these are separate and distinct from sexual and romantic orientation and gender identity.

A few things to know:

- ♥ In 1990, the American Psychological Association stated that scientific evidence shows that so-called reparative therapy does not work, and that it can do more harm than good.
- ♥ In 1997, the American Psychological Association again publicly cautioned against this harmful practice, also known as “conversion therapy.”
- ♥ In 1998, the American Psychiatric Association stated that “psychiatric literature strongly demonstrates that treatment attempts to change sexual orientation are ineffective. However, the potential risks are great, including depression, anxiety and self-destructive [suicidal] behavior.”
- ♥ The American Medical Association states in policy number H-160.991 that it “opposes the use of ‘reparative’ or ‘conversion’ therapy that is based upon the assumption that homosexuality per se is a mental disorder or based upon the assumption that the patient should change his/her homosexual orientation.”
- ♥ In 2001, the U.S. Surgeon General's Call to Action to Promote Sexual Health and Responsible Sexual Behavior asserted that homosexuality is not “a reversible lifestyle choice.”
- ♥ In 2009, the American Psychological Association added a resolution stating, “mental health professionals should avoid telling clients that they can change their sexual orientation through therapy or other treatments,” because there was no evidence that these efforts worked.

♥ In 2013, Exodus International—the world’s largest “ex-gay” ministry organization—shut its doors, its founder issuing an apology for the many harms their methods caused over the years.

So-called “conversion therapy” is deemed so harmful that there are now laws in many states outlawing the practice by medical professionals for minors, with other states—and the federal government—considering similar bills. Sadly, at the moment there are no laws in place that prevent clergy or “faith-based” practices to continue. Many PFLAG parents have seen firsthand how damaging the practice has been to their children. PFLAG members believe that it is important to educate society based on scientific facts and reputable professional opinions, not on the ideological and pseudo-scientific beliefs expressed by ex-gay ministries and advocates of reparative therapy. For families of faith who have a newly out loved one, getting information from reputable faith leaders and sources can be invaluable. To learn more, consider our publication **FAITH IN OUR FAMILIES**. You can find this and all of our publications at pflag.org/publications.

Knowing who these groups are and the various names under which they work is important. See the Resources section at the back of this book for a list of some of them.



The LGBTQ+ Community

I don't see LGBTQ+ people around me. Am I the only LGBTQ+ person in my community?

The short answer: No. You are definitely NOT the only one; you are one of many.

According to the Williams Institute, there are an estimated 13,042,000 people in the United States ages 13+ who identify as LGBTQ+, with 1.3 million adults ages 18+ and 300,000 youth ages 13-17 identifying as transgender.

These LGBTQ+ people are diverse and come from every race, ethnicity, faith tradition, political party, size, shape, disability, age, and occupation. And when they were teenagers, most of them probably felt the same way you do. If you get the feeling you're all by yourself, just remember: millions of people have gone through the journey you are undertaking.

You are not alone!

Community is key. For young people, Q Chat Space—created in collaboration with PFLAG National, CenterLink, and Planned Parenthood—offers a safe, moderated, chat-based, virtual meeting space for LGBTQ+ people ages 13-19. Learn more at qchatspace.org.

Sometimes I don't see myself reflected in the LGBTQ+ community. Are there resources for youth of color?

The short answer: Yes, there are more and more resources for LGBTQ+ youth of color and for others who have multiple identities (youth with disabilities, youth who are homeless, military youth, and others).

As an LGBTQ+ youth of color you might face issues that affect how you experience, act on, and come out regarding your sexual orientation or gender identity—including cultural and family traditions, access to resources, and immigration status. When deciding whether to come out, you might worry about jeopardizing your relationships with your family and friends in your racial/ethnic community, about being accepted as a person of color in white LGBTQ+ groups, and about potential racism and ignorance that you may find in some segments of the LGBTQ+ community.

PFLAG National knows that community and support is key. We offer several options.

- ♥ For young people, Q Chat Space—created in collaboration with PFLAG National, CenterLink, and Planned Parenthood—offers a safe, moderated, chat-based, virtual meeting space for LGBTQ+ people ages 13-19. There are a variety of meetings, including ones for youth of color. Learn more at qchatspace.org.
- ♥ For young people and their families, our *PFLAG Connects: Communities* program offers safe, moderated, virtual meeting spaces for people from common backgrounds to share their experience and support. Meetings for Black/African American, Latino, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and military families meet monthly, with more communities to come. Learn more at pflag.org/connects-communities.



Coming Out

Should I come out?

The short answer: Only if you want to, and only when you're ready and feel safe to do so. Don't come out just because someone else thinks you should.

Think of yourself as a puzzle. There are thousands of little pieces which make up who you are. Your sexuality, gender identity, and gender expression are just three parts of that puzzle—but without them, your picture would be incomplete.

Realizing you're LGBTQ+ doesn't change who you are, it just fills in some of the missing pieces. You get to decide whether to keep your picture to yourself, or whether—and to whom—to display it.

You can come out, or disclose, to one person, to friends and family only, or to everyone you know.

There's no reason to come out if you aren't ready. Sometimes there are very good reasons not to come out. There are people who won't accept you if you're LGBTQ+, people who will do and say unkind or even harmful things. They could be your parents, friends or classmates, or teachers or coworkers, people you love or depend on for financial help, companionship, encouragement, or other support. Like any big decision we make, there are real risks to coming out, and in the current climate especially, it's important to weigh them all.

However, there are also very good reasons to let some people know that you're LGBTQ+. Hiding your sexual orientation or gender identity keeps the important people in your life from knowing about a big part of you. By coming out you can live authentically, begin building community support, and form healthy relationships. Some LGBTQ+ people find that the loneliness and isolation of keeping a secret is worse than any fear of coming out.

Whatever your reasons for thinking you should or shouldn't come out, it's your decision and no one else's. It's also one you should make at your own speed.

How should I come out?

The short answer: Start by coming out to yourself. Then, choose those who are closest to you to tell first.

Before you come out to others, you must come out to yourself. It may sound strange, but it's actually very important. Knowing that you're LGBTQ+ is one thing but being comfortable with being LGBTQ+ and being sure of who you are as a person is another.

There's no standard or correct way to come out. Sometimes people make a joke out of it, surprise their friends, or slip it into a casual conversation. Some decide to sit their parents or families down and talk about it, while others feel more comfortable writing a letter, an email, or a text. It all depends on your relationship with your friends and family, how you communicate best, and how you feel most safe.

A support system is important when you're coming out. You'll want people around you who care about you and will be there for you, whether it's just to talk or to give you a hug when you need one, or to give you a place to stay, if necessary. If you don't feel that you already have people like that, contact the nearest PFLAG chapter or one of the other groups listed at the back of this publication.

Should I come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s) and how should I do it?

The short answer: If you're ready—and with care.

“When I came out to my parents as transgender, it was after thought and debate...I was tired of hiding myself at home and pretending being misgendered didn’t bother me.”

— Anonymous, 17, Madison, WI



Many LGBTQ+ youth say that their relationship with their parents was much closer after they came out because it was more honest. They say it was a relief to feel like they weren’t keeping a secret anymore.

Sometimes a young person doesn’t come out to their parents, but rather their parents discover that their children at a much earlier age—sometimes as young as two or three years old—are expressing signs of gender creativity. For these children, they and their parents work through the process together.

But it doesn’t always work that way, so before you come out to your parents, there are some things for you to consider:

Think about your parents’ general reaction to LGBTQ+ people. Find out as much as you can by observing them or asking indirect questions. Do they have friends who are LGBTQ+? Do they read books or go to movies that include LGBTQ+ people? Is their faith community welcoming? Have you heard them say that there’s nothing wrong with being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, gender nonconforming, or queer?

Think about your relationship with your parents. Have they shown that they love you even when they’re upset with you? Have they stuck by you even when you’ve done something they didn’t like?

Think about having a plan in place if they don’t respond well, including someone to call right away if you need support. If you had to leave home, do you have a place to stay? If your parents cut off financial support, do you have someone else who can help you?

You’re the only one who can answer these questions. Weigh the balance of “yes” and “no” responses when you’re thinking about coming out. Trust your gut. It’s almost always frightening coming out to your parent(s) or guardian(s), but if you’re scared about it, pay attention to that feeling, and honor it.

If your answer to all or most of the questions above is “no,” do not come out to your parents until you have a safe place to go to and a way to support yourself. You might be better off waiting until you’re on your own. If your answer to all or most of these questions is “yes,” then it’s probably safe to tell them.

If you decide you can and want to tell your parent(s), think about how you can make it easiest on yourself and on them. If you must choose between the two? *Put yourself first, always.*

Pick a time when your parents are relaxed and not pressured by work, family worries, or the holidays. Do it in a place where you feel comfortable, and only when you feel fully prepared for any upshot from the conversation.

You can prepare yourself with resources to offer them—or even lead with the resources as a way to share the information.

- ♥ **PFLAG meetings.** Offering up information about PFLAG meetings is also valuable, and many chapters offer both virtual and in-person meetings. Visit pflag.org/find to locate your local PFLAG chapter and speak to a parent who can talk with you about how your parents might react. This firsthand support can be invaluable. Be sure to ask that parent if you can have permission to put your own parents in touch with them, should they need that support.
- ♥ **PFLAG publications.** PFLAG National publications are also a great resource. Our publications are all accessible for free download or purchase from our website at pflag.org/publications. Ones to consider include:
 - **Our Children.** One of our most popular publications, this booklet answers several commonly asked questions about having an LGB child and includes a list of related resources that will help your parents in their own journey.
 - **Our Trans Loved Ones.** This publication is available for you and your parents if you identify as transgender or gender nonconforming.
 - **Faith in Our Families.** For families of faith, there are additional questions and considerations when a loved one comes out. This publication supports that faith journey for families.
- ♥ **PFLAG Connects: Communities.** For people with common backgrounds, our PFLAG Connects: Communities program offers safe, moderated, virtual meeting spaces where families can connect, share experiences, and get support. Current monthly meetings are offered for Black/African American, Latino, AAPI, and military families. Learn more at pflag.org/connects-communities.
- ♥ **PFLAG National Online Community.** Sometimes, the need for support for parents is immediate, and cannot wait for a scheduled monthly meeting. The PFLAG National Online Community is a private group on Facebook that anyone can join by answering a few simple questions. It’s a safe space where

people can find peer-to-peer support quickly and, if desired, anonymously, by asking questions and connecting with others. Visit facebook.com/groups/pflagnational.

Even if they're accepting of LGBTQ+ people in general, your parents may be surprised to learn that you are LGBTQ+. How they respond from there can vary.

Some parents are affirming right away, whether they had an inkling about your identity or not, and are ready to support, celebrate, and show up for their LGBTQ+ kids immediately, ready to show up at a Pride march with PFLAG. Other parents have a harder time. They may not want to believe it at first or might need time to adjust. In fact, some parents who are extremely affirming and even show up as allies to the community sometimes need a moment when it's their own child who comes out. Those parents more quickly come around to being affirming and supportive. Other parents have a harder time; in the extreme, they may talk about bringing in clergy or a medical professional to "cure" you.

In earlier generations, there were a lot of incorrect theories blaming parents for playing a role in influencing their child's sexual orientation and gender identity. In fact, PFLAG's founders talked about this in an early television interview in the 1970s, sharing that they believed this at first, but quickly learned that they were wrong, and that their parenting had nothing at all to do with "making" their child gay. As a result of these early theories, however, your parents may still worry about whether they have failed you in some way as parents, and that worry can come out as anger and defensiveness.

Some parents, including parents of strong faith, could feel that their way of life is being rejected, or that you've somehow changed their dreams for you. This feeling of rejection, however, is very common among parents of all teens, LGBTQ+ and not, especially as teens become more independent moving into young adulthood; at some point, every parent must let go of their image of who or what their child will be.

Even if they don't have those reactions, your parents are probably going to feel worried about you, especially in today's world. In fact, they may share the same worries you have about whether your identity will put you in danger, whether the city or state you live in is a safe place for you to be, and whether your life will be happy. These are valid concerns, held by both affirming and non-affirming parents. If your parents are loving and supportive and holding these concerns, you can work through them together.

No matter what, how you come out and to whom you come out are your choice. This includes whether your parents have your permission to tell others about your identity. In a way, your parents will start a coming-out process of their own. Provide them with resources, answer questions as you feel comfortable, and always put your own wellbeing first. Ultimately, the more support you—and they—have, the better.

I came out to everyone at my school's first-ever GSA meeting...instead of giving my feminine birth name, I introduced myself as Elijah and admitted that I was trans. I remember trembling with fear, but everyone was brilliantly accepting.

— Anonymous, 16, Olmsted Falls, Ohio



I can't come out to my parent(s) or guardian(s). Whom should I tell?

The short answer: If not your parent(s) or guardian(s), tell only the people you most trust.

Coming out isn't something that you do once, and then it's over. You might decide to come out now to family members and later to friends, or the other way around. Or perhaps you could come out to a sibling now, and later to the rest of the family and your friends.

If you are transgender or gender nonconforming, some people—including your teachers, principal, and classmates—might be uncomfortable with how you publicly express yourself, especially if it challenges people's sense of how they believe people are "supposed to" dress and act. How you express your gender is something to think about, discuss with people you trust, and evaluate in terms of your safety and what kind of community you have around you.

The people you tell first should be the ones you trust the most: trust not to hurt you, trust to accept you for who you are, and trust to respect your privacy and hold confidential anything you share with them.

Having a strong support network is critical as you start the coming out process. The resources at the back of this publication—including your local PFLAG chapter—are a great place to start! Then, being to think about the pros and cons of telling friends. What could you gain or lose by telling a particular person? If it's a friend, are they likely to support you or withdraw from you? Would they keep the information private if you asked them to do so, or would they tell other kids at school without your permission? Do you have a support system to help you if this is the case? Would your relationship grow stronger through revealing your identity or strained by not sharing the information?

Think about what kinds of things you've been able to share with them in the past and how they have reacted. If you want to come out to someone, and you aren't sure how they'll react, try to feel them out first. You could get them talking about a current event, book, movie, or TV show about people who are LGBTQ+.

Keep in mind, though, that someone's reaction to an LGBTQ+ person in a movie might not be the same as it would be if that person were their sibling or their friend. And it can work both ways: people might seem either more or less prejudiced in a hypothetical or fictional situation than they would when responding to someone close to them.

For example, a friend or a loved one might joke about an LGBTQ+ character in a movie—or might do so because they think you expect that—but show far more thoughtfulness and a desire to understand when responding to your coming out. On the other hand, friends and loved ones who seem accepting of LGBTQ+ characters in the media might be far less accepting of someone close to them who identifies as LGBTQ+.

To get a sense of how someone might react to your being LGBTQ+, try to keep your questions specific, personal, and thought provoking. If, for example, you have a friend who has a sibling off at college or in the military, you could ask about GSAs on college campuses, or whether their sibling is dating someone in a gender-non-specific way. Their answers might give you an indication of how they could respond and will allow you to determine your own best next step.

Will people accept me after I come out?

The short answer: Some people will accept you and some won't.

Prejudice and discrimination are everywhere in America and around the world and it takes time to overcome bias and change attitudes.

If you are LGBTQ+, it is more likely than not that you will run into prejudice. Our society is rooted in heteronormativity and cisnormativity—meaning, an assumption that everyone is straight and cisgender (not transgender), which can influence people to discriminate against those who don't fit into that pattern. That assumption has begun to change, but it is still real for many people.

Our society also has assumptions about what it means to be a particular sex or gender and may judge others by how they conform to those preconceptions. These are called “gender roles,” and they refer to how people are “supposed” to behave. These biases are changing too—but roles remain rigid in many places, and the lasting effects of discrimination, preconceptions, and biases persist.

Anti-LGBTQ+ biases are being challenged as more people get to know people who are LGBTQ+, because more of them are out than ever before. Attitudes are also changing because other people are serving as vocal and active allies to the

LGBTQ+ community to say, “They are my friends,” “they are my colleagues,” or “they are my neighbors”—and “I’m proud of them.”

Right now in the U.S., it is estimated that eight in ten people can say that they personally know someone who is LGBTQ+. If you choose to come out, you’ll be part of making that number even bigger, giving people the opportunity to get to know you, and transforming biased beliefs to ones of affirmation and celebration.

Will I lose my non-LGBTQ+ friends? Where will I find LGBTQ+ friends?

The short answer: To the first question—probably not. And to the second—everywhere.

Some friends will be supportive right away. One or two friends might have already guessed that you’re LGBTQ+, and you may find that you already have LGBTQ+ friends and didn’t know it. Some might not be as understanding or accepting, possibly because their families aren’t, or they are in a faith tradition that isn’t. Over time, their understanding and feelings may evolve—after all, they know you and are friends with you, and just their care for you can help them to challenge the harmful assumptions they are holding on to. Others might never evolve or change, and this can be hard and painful, but will also help you make space for new friends who do accept and love you for exactly who you are.

Just as with your parents, consider how each friend is likely to feel when they learn that you are LGBTQ+, and how you can let them see that you haven’t changed as a person; offering them some of the resources listed in the back of this publication can help.

Meeting new friends who are LGBTQ+ is an important part of creating community. These are people who know exactly what you’re going through because they’ve been there or are in the process of coming out themselves.

As far as where to find them? Opportunities abound! From PFLAG National, these include:

- ♥ **Q Chat Space.** Created in collaboration with PFLAG National, CenterLink, and Planned Parenthood, Q Chat Space offers a safe, moderated, chat-based, virtual meeting space for LGBTQ+ people ages 13-19. There are a variety of meetings, including ones for youth of color. Learn more at qchatspace.org.
- ♥ **PFLAG Connects: Communities.** This program offers safe, moderated, virtual meeting spaces for people from common backgrounds to share their experience and support. Meetings for Black/African American, Latino, Asian American/Pacific Islander, and military families meet monthly, with more communities to come. Learn more at pflag.org/connects-communities.

LGBTQ+ youth organizations are another good place to start because you won’t have to try to figure out whether another teen there is LGBTQ+ or an ally. Most major cities have LGBTQ+ youth organizations where you’ll be able to meet people easily. Often you can find them at your local LGBTQ+ center. Your school

might have a Gay-Straight or Gender-Sexuality Alliance (GSA), and GSAs almost always have a supportive teacher or staff member as a sponsor. This is another excellent place to find not only peer support but also a trusted adult.

If you're in a small town or in a rural area, it may be harder to find groups like these. In that case, you can get in touch with peers through the websites and hotlines listed in the back of this publication. The organizations in the resource directory can also help you find more specific groups, such as organizations for LGBTQ+ people who are African American, Arab, Asian-Pacific Islander, or Latino, or support groups for LGBTQ+ people who are disabled or neurodiverse.

Even if it seems to you that you must be the only LGBTQ+ person at your school, you aren't. There are other LGBTQ+ students at your school whom you might already know (but not know that they're LGBTQ+) or whom you might not have met yet. Remember this the next time you feel alone.

Can I have a family of my own?

The short answer: Yes. Throughout the world, LGBTQ+ couples form and build long-lasting families. And now, in many places, they can marry.

As of June 26, 2015, marriage equality has been the law of the land in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., as well as all U.S. territories except American Samoa, since the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that state-level bans on same-sex marriage are unconstitutional. As of 2023, same-sex marriage is legally recognized in 35 countries: Andorra, Argentina, Australia, Austria, Belgium, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Denmark, Ecuador, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, Malta, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Uruguay.

For those who want a family that includes children—whether by blood, foster care, or adoption—there are a variety of options.

While there are still legal and legislative challenges, LGBTQ+ people throughout the world are living with partners or spouses in happy, healthy, and thriving relationships and families. They also play a tremendous role in helping create a society in which these relationships receive support to thrive.

I feel so alone, are there people I can talk to?

The short answer: You aren't alone. There are people out there who are ready to help.

First and foremost, if you have any thoughts of self-harm, turn immediately to the front inside cover of this book for a list of helpline numbers that you can call.

The best thing you can do is find someone to talk to whom you can trust. Maybe it is an individual you already know—a friend, parent, sibling, or a friend's parent or

older sibling. Maybe it's an adult to whom you have confided in the past and whom you know you can trust again.

If you don't know anyone with whom you're comfortable talking and who will be supportive and understanding, start by reaching out to PFLAG. You can find a local chapter at pflag.org/find or join our PFLAG National Online Community at facebook.com/groups/pflagnational. You can also connect with other LGBTQ+ youth through our Q Chat Space program; learn more at qchatspace.org.

Other options include connecting through the online help sections of the organizations listed in the back of this publication. You don't have to give your name, and they won't try to talk you into or out of anything.

If you don't feel ready to talk with someone on the phone, you can learn more by reading resources and information from other youth on some of the websites listed at the end of this publication. Many organizations provide email addresses to which you can send questions confidentially. Others have live chat support. Please remember to use good judgment when making any contacts, whether on the phone, online, or in person. Your safety and well-being should always be your top priority.

Whatever you choose, talking does help. Talking to others and being open and honest can be an affirming way for you to connect with your own feelings, connect with others in your life, and connect with those in vibrant and diverse LGBTQ+ communities. And best of all, you'll learn that you're not alone.



Staying Safe

What if I'm harassed at school?

The short answer: You do not have to tolerate harassment at school or anywhere; there are many resources—and people—available to help you.

School can be challenging for LGBTQ+ youth, who might hear jokes and insults on a regular basis not only from other students, but sometimes from teachers or school employees. This harassment can be both verbal and physical, as well as denial of opportunities; for example, for trans youth, many schools do not have dress codes, bathrooms, locker rooms, or gym classes that meet their needs. Many schools also do not have inclusive policies for trans athletes. As of 2023, a number of states have laws in place banning creating these safe spaces and policies; some even ban books, lesson plans, and conversation inclusive of LGBTQ+ identities.

Regardless of your sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, you have the right to a safe learning environment, and there are lots of resources available to help you and your parent(s) or guardian(s) create such an environment. One of PFLAG's top priorities is to help students, parents, guardians, and educators create safe and affirming schools. To learn more about our safe-school work, please visit pflag.org/safeschools and pflag.org/claimyourrights for more information and safe school resources.

What if I'm harassed outside of school?

The short answer: Harassment outside of school should be reported to the local police or to an adult you trust.

If you are harassed, assaulted, or victimized in any way because of your sexual orientation or gender identity or expression, contact your local police or tell a trusted adult as soon as possible. You may have been the victim of a hate crime.

Hate crimes occur when someone targets another person based on a characteristic they have or a group they belong to, like being LGBTQ+ or being a member of a certain race. In America, any violent assault against an LGBTQ+ person because of their sexuality or gender identity can be considered a federal crime. This is part of the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr., Hate Crimes Prevention Act, which was passed into law in 2009.

Many states have their own hate crime laws which protect their citizens. Even if your state doesn't protect against crimes committed due to sexual orientation and gender identity/expression bias, you can still file a police report and seek justice.

If what happened to you wasn't exactly a crime, but it made you feel threatened, you can still file an incident report at your local police station. It's very important to tell the police what happened to protect yourself and potentially others.

Here we want to recognize that working with law enforcement can have challenges, too. This is especially true in typically underrepresented communities, including communities of color and the LGBTQ+ community. If speaking with local law enforcement doesn't feel safe for you, please reach out to PFLAG National, at love@pflag.org. Our relationships are expansive, and we can help you find people local to you who can assist.

In addition to harassment in person, online harassment is real and can be violating too. According to the National Crime Prevention Council, cyberbullying is using the Internet, cell phones, video game systems, or other technology to send or post text or images intended to harm or embarrass another person. If you are at any time harassed, threatened, taunted, or teased via technology—no matter where you are—it is important to contact a trusted adult or authority as soon as possible.

Remember: You are not alone, and there are people ready to help. Visit pflag.org/claimyourrights for more information. Additionally, the Resources section of this publication will help you find organizations that can provide assistance.

While harassment and cyberbullying do not always elevate to the level of a hate crime, they are just as potentially detrimental and dangerous.

Do I need to worry about HIV and AIDS?

The short answer: Everybody needs to be informed about HIV and AIDS.

HIV (human immunodeficiency virus) is the virus that causes AIDS (acquired immunodeficiency syndrome). Unlike some viruses, HIV cannot be eliminated by the human body: as of now, once you have HIV, you have it for life. Doctors, researchers, activists, and others around the world are working hard to find one, but there is still no cure for HIV/AIDS. Improved treatments, however, are increasingly alleviating the symptoms and prolonging life.

Since the onset of the HIV/AIDS epidemic, many people have viewed HIV/AIDS as strictly “a gay issue.” The LGBTQ+ community—including PFLAG’s founders and first leaders—mobilized early in the epidemic to organize a response. This response included educating communities, increasing LGBTQ+ visibility to reduce stigma, developing prevention strategies, and advocating for appropriate care and treatment options for people living with HIV/AIDS. Yet the epidemic has continued to progress and take its toll on many diverse communities globally. Still, despite overwhelming statistics documenting the spread of HIV/AIDS in other communities, many people still choose to view HIV/AIDS as only a gay issue. Visit cdc.gov/hiv/basics/transmission.html for a comprehensive list of how HIV/AIDS is spread.

The fact is that being LGBTQ+ does not infect a person with HIV or AIDS. Certain sexual behaviors, IV drug use, and other factors can put one at risk for becoming infected with HIV as well as other sexually transmitted infections (STIs). Thankfully, in addition to current treatments, there is now pre-exposure prophylaxis (or PrEP), which is medicine taken to prevent getting HIV. PrEP is highly effective for preventing HIV when taken as prescribed, reducing the risk of getting HIV from sex by about 99% and the risk of getting HIV from injection drug use by at least 74%.

PrEP is less effective when not taken as prescribed, and since it only protects against HIV, condom use is still important for the protection against other STDs. Condom use is also important to help prevent HIV if PrEP is not taken as prescribed.

For the most up-to-date information on HIV/AIDS, including high-risk behaviors, testing, treatment, and more, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s HIV/AIDS website at cdc.gov/hiv/.

ORGANIZATIONS AND RESOURCES

LGBTQ+ Support Organizations and Resources

The following list includes just a few of the groups and resources that may be able to provide you with information or services. For resources by state, visit pflagnation.al/stateyouthresources.

Advocates For Youth

advocatesforyouth.org
(202) 419-3420

Ali Forney Center

aliforneycenter.org
(212) 222-3427

Bisexual Resource Center

biresource.net
(617) 424-9595

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere (COLAGE), a program of Family Equality

colage.org
(415) 861-5437

GLSEN

glsen.org
(212) 727-0135

Genders & Sexualities Alliance Network (GSA Network)

gsanetwork.org
(415) 552-4229

National Center for Transgender Equality (NCTE)

transequality.org
(202) 903-0112

National LGBTQ+ Task Force

thetaskforce.org
(202) 393-5177

Planned Parenthood

plannedparenthood.org
(800) 230-7526

Q Chat Space

qchatspace.org

Scarleteen

scarleteen.com

Sex Etc

sexetc.org

Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SEICUS)

SIECUS.org
(212) 819-9770

The Trevor Project

thetrevorproject.org
thetrevorproject.org/chat
(866) 488-7386

True Colors United

truecolorsunited.org
(212) 461-7386

Anti-LGBTQ+ Organizations to Avoid

The following is a list of names of just a few of the groups that have formed to oppose basic civil rights and equality for people who are LGBTQ+. Knowing who they are and the harm that they pose is critical. You can find a more comprehensive and descriptive list on our website at pflag.org/antilgbtq/.

- Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF)
- Alliance for Therapeutic Choice and Scientific Integrity (ATCSI)
- American College of Pediatricians
- American Family Association
- Americans for Truth about Homosexuality (AFTAH)
- Christian Anti-Defamation Commission (CADC)
- Concerned Women for America
- Courage/Encourage
- Defend the Family
- Family Research Institute
- Focus on the Family
- Liberty Counsel
- Moms For Liberty (M4L)
- National Organization for Marriage
- Parents & Friends of Ex-Gays and Gays (PFOX)
- Positive Approaches To Healthy Sexuality (PATH)

When I was in 8th grade, I was outed, endured bullying, and became depressed. My mom really struggled with my sexuality for years. Finally, through a lot of struggle, I accepted it and so did she. Five years later, I am a strong and proud member of the LGBTQ+ community and my mom started working for PFLAG in our state.

— Magdalen S., 17, Fenton, Michigan



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