COMING OUT AS A STRAIGHT SUPPORTER

A GUIDE TO LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER AMERICANS

PFLAG
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION™

WELCOME

Maybe you always suspected. Maybe it's a total surprise. But no matter what, when a friend, loved one or acquaintance makes the decision to come out and tell you about being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT), it is always a unique event.

For a lot of people, learning that someone they know and care about is LGBT can open a range of emotions, from confused to concerned, awkward to honored. It may be hard to know how to react, leaving you with questions about what to say, how to talk about being LGBT and wanting to know what you can do to be supportive.

You might be drawn to this guide because you want to provide guidance for LGBT people in your role as a teacher, counselor or religious leader. Or maybe you're reading this guide simply because you are interested in the coming out process.

Whatever reason brought you here — you have come to the right place. This guide is designed to help build understanding and comfort.

If you are new to LGBT issues, we will answer many of your questions. Or, if you have known LGBT people for years and are simply looking to find new ways to show your support, you can skim and take the pieces that are relevant to you.

The Human Rights Campaign Foundation and its Coming Out Project hope this resource, created in partnership with Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), helps you build bridges of understanding with the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in your life. Welcome.

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& IN THE BEGINNING

Someone you know and care about is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. He or she has "come out" to you, either directly in conversation or by letting you know in some other way.

If you take nothing else away from this guide, remember this: that person in your life who opened up to you made a conscious choice to let you into his or her life, to be honest in his or her relationship with you. That is an act of trust. In doing so, that person has said that he or she wants your relationship to be based on truth.

Now it is up to both of you to find the courage to accept the challenge of honesty. That means being honest with yourself — acknowledging your feelings and coming to terms with them. And it means being honest with this person in your life — asking questions you need to ask, learning the facts and making the effort to understand the realities of being an LGBT individual so that you can be truly informed and supportive.

When a close friend or family member, or even a colleague, tells you that he or she is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender — either directly or indirectly — that person is also telling you that you are someone who matters, and that he or she wants to be honest and genuine with you.

No one knows for sure what makes gay people gay, or why transgender people are transgender. If you ask most LGBT people, they will tell you they did not choose their sexual orientation or gender identity any more than they chose to have blue eyes or brown eyes — it simply is how they were born.

All available research on sexual orientation and gender identity strongly suggests that there is some biological component that defines an individual's orientation or innate gender.

At the end of the day, the "hows" and "whys" are not important. What is key is that someone in your life has made a conscious decision to reveal an important part of his or her individuality to you.

Coming out is an extremely personal experience that is different for each person. It is often challenging and evokes emotions of fear, relief, pride and embarrassment. The experience can be daunting, because many LGBT people do not know how their friends, family members or others will react. This uncertainty can be overwhelming.

But one thing is certain — the person who is coming out wants their relationships to be based on honesty.

A NOTE ON OUTING

Most LGBT people prefer to come out in their own ways and in their own time. Unfortunately, an LGBT person's sexual orientation or gender identity may be exposed without his or her knowledge or consent. "Outing" takes the decision-making out of the individual's hands, which can be painful and awkward for everyone involved.

If someone has not come out to you, do not assume that he or she does not trust or care for you. The person may not be ready, or may still be coming to terms with his or her own sexual orientation or gender identity.

Showing your support, acceptance and respect for an LGBT person who has been outed can help the healing process and may help both of you to build a stronger, more genuine relationship.

HAVE COURAGE

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people often grow up feeling "different" from the rest — and are typically keenly aware that the things that make them different may cause them to be rejected or discriminated against.

Just as it takes courage for LGBT people to be open and honest about who they are, it also takes courage to support your LGBT friends or loved ones.

We live in a society where prejudice still exists; where discrimination, both legal and illegal, is still far too common; and where even the physical safety of your friend, loved one or acquaintance can be at risk. That's an unfortunate reality — and that's part of your friend's or loved one's life.

Recognizing these facts and giving your support to that person will not only take your relationship to a higher level — it can also help take a small step toward a better and more accepting world, for your loved one and for all of us.

In fact, actively working to change these realities in our society is a great way to show support and achieve the type of world your friend or loved one deserves to live in.

DEALING WITH YOUR FEELINGS WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT

So now you have some sense of what it feels like to come out to others. But what about how you feel?

Typically, straight people who have just had someone come out to them report feeling:

Honored that someone has chosen to entrust you with this revelation:
"It was a cool moment. I'll remember it for the rest of my life. You only share something like this with people who matter."
— *Sharon, a sister, Wyoming*

Accepting and wanting to move on:
"You shouldn't build a relationship on whether you are gay or straight. True friendship is not based on that."
— *Chris, a college friend, Idaho*

Curious about what life is like for LGBT people:
"Why? How? You ask those questions."
— *Brandon, a dad, Oregon*

Apprehension or discomfort:
"The unknown causes you to pull back."
— *Donna, a co-worker, Florida*

Disapproval of the perceived "gay lifestyle":
"I never ask him about it — I don't accept it."
— *Steve, an uncle, Maine*

Anxiety for the well-being of your LGBT friend or family member:
"What are you supposed to do? How are we supposed to act? I get angry at how the world will treat him."
— *Amy, a mom, Texas*

It is normal to feel many of these seemingly contradictory emotions at once, leaving you feeling uncertain.

Feeling confused or uncomfortable doesn't make you a bad person. It doesn't mean you are homophobic or transphobic. It does mean you should take the time to work through your feelings fully or honestly so you can reach a place of support for your friend, loved one or acquaintance without reservation.

While you don't need to hide your emotions, it is important to remember that this individual who came out to you is searching for support and acceptance. Before you begin to ask questions to settle your own uncertainty about the situation, it is key that you make the other person feel that they made the right decision to come out to you. You might respond by saying, "Thank you for being honest" or "I appreciate your trust."

You don't have to bottle up your emotions for fear of saying the wrong thing. Use them as the basis for an honest conversation. Ask the questions you need to ask. Have a real talk. And when it's over, you're likely to find that your relationship is stronger and richer than ever.

FOR PEOPLE OF FAITH

After a friend or loved one has come out to you, you might find yourself needing, and perhaps struggling, to come out as a person of faith who supports LGBT equality.

Many denominations and faith traditions are open and welcoming of LGBT people; many are not. If you come from a religious background that teaches that homosexuality and gender variance are wrong or immoral, look back to your texts and history and challenge those assertions in a way that honors your relationship to LGBT friends and loved ones. Visit *hrc.org/religion* and *straightforequality.org/faith* to find resources to guide you.

If you come from a more affirming tradition, challenge yourself, your congregation and your community leaders to take the next steps in building an even more supportive spiritual home for LGBT people of faith. You might be surprised to find your own faith deepened and your community strengthened by your actions.

HAVING CONVERSATIONS

Having conversations about life as a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender person may be difficult. It is normal to feel a little awkward, or to be a little afraid of saying the "wrong thing" and making it "weird."

Here are some ways to help start an open dialogue:

Ask Respectful Questions to Show You Are Interested

- When did you know?
- What was it like growing up?
- What kind of relationship would you ideally hope for in your life?
- How did you know it was the right time to come out?
- What has the coming out process been like for you?
- How are you holding up?
- What can I do to support you?

Be Honest

- Tell your friend this is new for you — and if you feel awkward, say so.
- Ask your relative to be honest with you about what you say or do that may make him or her uncomfortable.
- Tell your acquaintance if he or she does or says something that makes you uncomfortable.
- Be as open and honest as you would like your friend or loved one to be with you.
- Ask the "dumb questions."
- Tell your friend or co-worker that you need a little time to process the information.

Be Reassuring

Explain to your friend that revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity has not changed how you feel about them, but it might take a little while for you to digest what they have told you. You still care for and respect them as much as you ever have or more.

Laugh a Little

Humor helps break the ice — if it's done gently and respectfully. As long as you're sure that you're laughing *with* people, and not *at* them — feel free to bring a little humor to the conversation.

Understand, too, that while some LGBT people may use terms with one another in a way they think is funny or affectionate, that does not mean that you, as a straight person, should necessarily follow their lead. When in doubt, ask your friend or relative if it would be appropriate for you to use the same terms.

Send Gentle Signals

Showing and sharing your acceptance and support can be very easy. Straight people often don't realize that LGBT people keep watch for signs from their straight friends, family and acquaintances about whether it is safe to be open with them.

Some ways you can show your support include:

- Casually mentioning a news item about an LGBT issue in a positive way.
- Mentioning other LGBT friends or family you might have.
- Putting a symbol like the Human Rights Campaign equal sign, the PFLAG symbol or a sticker from another LGBT-supportive organization in your office or home.
- Refraining from using demeaning words and challenging anti-LGBT jokes and rhetoric.
- Inviting your friend or family member to bring their partner to a social event.
- Reading an LGBT publication.
- Joining an LGBT-related Facebook group.
- Tweeting or blogging a message in support of LGBT issues.
- Suggesting you get together to watch a movie or show with LGBT topics or characters.

TALKING WITH YOUR STRAIGHT FRIENDS & FAMILY

After someone in your life has come out to you — particularly if it is someone close to you, like a child or loved one — you may find yourself deciding how, or if, to tell people in your life that someone you care about is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.

It's important to remember that the person who has just come out to you could be sensitive about how, when and with whom his or her sexual orientation or gender identity is discussed. This might be especially true if you are one of the first people he or she has told, if he or she was outed in a way that adds stress or if his or her work or home life could be adversely affected by the disclosure.

Remember that your friend or family member would probably prefer to stay in control of his or her own coming out process. There is, in fact, a strict policy of confidentiality at all Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays community-based support groups, so that everyone can feel safe sharing personal feelings and information.

That said, as long as you have the permission of the person who has come out to you to speak with others about it, these conversations can:

- Help you digest the information.
- Provide support as you sort through your emotions.
- Build more honest and genuine relationships.

By opening up and being honest with the people in your life about knowing and caring for an LGBT person, you will be taking a small but important step toward making the world more understanding and supportive for that person.

As you begin to have conversations with others about having someone close to you come out, you will probably use many of the same skills and lessons that will help you talk openly with the person who just came out to you.

More often than not, people will take their cues from you about how to deal with this.

THERE IS NO ONE "RIGHT" WAY TO BECOME A MORE SUPPORTIVE FRIEND, LOVED ONE OR COLLEAGUE. BUT THERE IS A PROCESS THAT MANY GO THROUGH IN LEARNING HOW TO BE EVER MORE SUPPORTIVE.

1 UNCERTAINTY, EMBARRASSMENT, CURIOSITY

Dealing with the initial newness and possible surprise that a friend, loved one or acquaintance is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender can be awkward and challenging as you begin your process of understanding.

2 ACCEPTANCE

Coming to terms with the fact that your friend, family member or acquaintance is LGBT, and that sexual orientation and gender identity and expression are basic parts of who people are, like the color of their eyes, hair or skin.

3 SUPPORT

Realizing that in order to have genuine, open connections to LGBT friends or family members, you will have to find a way to support them as they are — and then doing so.

4 LETTING YOUR SUPPORT INFORM YOUR DECISIONS

Finally, it's about working to develop a true understanding of what it means to be LGBT in America and trying to do your part to help break down the walls of prejudice and discrimination that still exist — for example, by supporting businesses with appropriate anti-discrimination policies, saying you don't appreciate "humor" that demeans LGBT people when it happens or learning about where political candidates stand on issues that have an impact on the LGBT community.

SOME FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Part of being ever more supportive of your lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender friends, loved ones or acquaintances means developing a true understanding of how the world views and treats them.

There is a lot of good news on this front. America has become a much more open and accepting country.

Some Interesting Facts:

- Same-sex couples live in 99.3 percent of all counties nationwide. (2000 U.S. Census)
- There are more than 1 million lesbian and gay veterans in the United States. (Urban Institute)
- 58 percent of all Fortune 500 companies offer domestic partner health benefits to their employees' same-sex partners. (2012 HRC Workplace Project)
- In a 2006 national poll, 80 percent of Catholics said they agree with this statement: "Marriage is about love and commitment. Regardless of how I personally feel about gay people getting married, I don't think it is my place to judge these people's love for and commitment to each other." (Accredited Research by Peter D. Hart & Associates)
- There are at least 2 million children being raised by same-sex couples in the United States — and probably many more. (2010 U.S. Census)
- More than 75 percent of American voters believe it should be illegal to fire someone just because they are transgender. (HRC/Hart Research poll, 2005)

Yet, even as we justifiably celebrate this progress, you should also know that your LGBT friends and loved ones are likely to face real challenges in their lives.

Some Unfortunate, But True, Facts:

- Gay and lesbian people can still be fired from their jobs in 29 states, simply for being gay. And transgender people can be fired in 34 states. These individuals have no legal recourse as there is no federal legislation to protect them from workplace discrimination in this country.

- 84.6 percent of LGBT students report being verbally harassed — name-calling, threats, etc. — at school. (GLSEN, 2009)
- Hate crimes against LGBT Americans are on the rise, even as other violent crimes continue to decline. As of 2009, federal hate crimes laws protect LGBT Americans. (FBI Hate Crimes Statistics 2009)
- Of the 1.6 million homeless American youth, between 20 and 40 percent identify as LGBT. Additionally, an alarming 26 percent of LGBT teens who come out to their parents are told to leave home. (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, 2007)

WILL PEOPLE THINK I'M GAY?

This is a question that many people have — and are often afraid to ask out loud. The simple answer is: Yes, it is possible that people may wonder if you are gay if you show your support for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues.

At the same time, most people understand that supporting fairness and equality for LGBT people does not mean that a person is gay — it means that a person values respect and acceptance for all Americans.

People who have not had a personal relationship with an LGBT individual are often unaware of the issues facing the community. By being an advocate and supporter of LGBT equality, you are leading by example. Odds are others will follow.

Many civil rights movements were successful because people from nearly every part of society stood shoulder to shoulder in fighting bias.

The work to make America safer and fairer for LGBT people will take the effort and understanding of both straight and LGBT Americans. That is why it is so important that you are reading this guide.

WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

There are many different ways that you can show your support for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people in your life. There is no one "right" way to do so.

Here are some easy ways you might demonstrate your support that fit naturally into most people's lives:

- Create social settings that bring your straight and LGBT friends and family together.
- Talk openly and honestly with your LGBT loved ones about their lives.
- Find opportunities to talk openly with your straight friends about your LGBT friends and family and the issues they face.
- Make sure that you include the same-sex partner of your LGBT loved one in events and activities just as you would any other friend's spouse or significant other.
- Don't allow anti-LGBT jokes or statements expressed in your presence to go unchallenged.
- Integrate inclusive language into your regular conversations, professional interactions and/or spiritual life.
- Get involved with pro-LGBT groups and campaigns and contact your elected officials about equality.
- Join pro-LGBT causes or groups on Facebook and through other social networking opportunities.
- Attend pride celebrations and other LGBT community events.
- Demonstrate your open support by displaying an HRC or PFLAG bumper sticker, mug or poster, or similar items from other local or national organizations.
- Visit the PFLAG website at **www.pflag.org** for information on local meetings and PFLAG public education programs across the country.
- Find out if your employer has an equal rights policy. If not, encourage the organization's leadership to adopt one.

- Also, participate in any employee resource groups that support LGBT employees.
- Research the views of candidates for public office and factor their stand on LGBT equality into your decision on who to vote for.
- Sign up online at **www.hrc.org** and at **www.pflag.org** to get updates on new developments.

These additional resources are available from PFLAG at **www.pflag.org/publications**:

- The Guide to Being a Straight Ally
- Straight for Equality in Healthcare
- be not afraid – help is on the way: straight for equality in faith communities
- Our Daughters and Sons: Questions and Answers for Parents of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People
- Nuestras hijas y nuestros hijos: preguntas y repuestas para padres de gays, lesbianas y bisexuales
- Welcoming Our Trans Family and Friends
- Opening the Straight Spouse's Closet — A Guide for Understanding Issues Facing Families with GLBT Spouses
- Be Yourself: Questions and Answers for GLBT Youth
- Faith in Our Families: Parents, Families and Friends Talk About Religion and Homosexuality

HRC also has a growing number of resources available at **www.hrc.org/publications**:

- The HRC Resource Guide to Coming Out
- Answers to Questions About Marriage Equality
- Living Openly in Your Place of Worship
- For The Bible Tells Me So
- Gender Identity & Our Faith Communities
- Transgender Visibility: A Guide to Being You
- Buying for Workplace Equality: A Guide to Companies, Products and Services that Support LGBT Equality
- Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans
- Healthcare Equality Index
- Corporate Equality Index
- Guia de recursos para salir de closet

> GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender identity or expression because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable.

bisexual – A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously. A bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary as sexual identity develops over time.

coming out – A lifelong self-acceptance process. LGBT people identify this identity first to themselves and then may reveal it to others. Publicly identifying one's identity may or may not be part of the coming out process.

gay – A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

gender expression – External manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through masculine, feminine or gender variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics. Typically, transgender people seek to make their gender expression match their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex.

gender identity – One's personal sense of their gender. For transgender people, their birth-assigned sex and their own sense of gender identity do not match.

genderqueer – A word people use to describe their own non-standard gender identity or by those who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

homophobia – The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who love and are sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

internalized homophobia – Self-identification of societal stereotypes by an LGBT person, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation or gender identity.

lesbian – A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women.

LGBT – An acronym for "lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender."

living openly – A state in which LGBT people are out about their sexual orientation or gender identity in their personal, public and/or professional lives.

outing – The act of publicly declaring someone's sexual orientation or gender identity, sometimes based on rumor or speculation, without that person's consent.

queer – Traditionally considered a derogatory term, it has been adopted by many LGBT people (especially young people) to describe themselves.

same-gender loving – A term some prefer to use instead of "gay" or "lesbian" to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

sexual orientation – An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex, opposite-sex or a bisexual orientation.

sexual preference – A term considered offensive by many LGBT people. It suggests that being LGBT is a voluntary decision that can be "cured."

straight supporter – A person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic remarks and behaviors, and explores and understands these forms of bias within him- or herself.

transgender – An umbrella term describing a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most people expect. It includes people who describe themselves as transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender nonconforming.

transphobia – The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.

transsexual – An older medical term used to describe people whose gender identity and birth-assigned sex do not match. Many people prefer the term "transgender" to describe themselves.

The Human Rights Campaign would like to thank the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (www.glaad.org) for providing definitions for many of these terms.

MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT LGBT PEOPLE

Most of the negative stereotypes of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people are based on erroneous or inadequate information. The myths:

It's a "choice." Sexual orientation and gender identity are not choices, any more than having brown eyes or any more than *you chose* to be straight. The choice is in deciding whether or not to live your life openly and honestly with yourself and others.

It's a "lifestyle." It is sometimes said that LGBT people live a gay "lifestyle." The problem with that word is that it trivializes LGBT people and the struggles they face. Being LGBT is no more a lifestyle than being straight — it's a life, just like anyone else's.

LGBT people can "change" or be "cured." No scientifically valid evidence exists that shows that people can change their sexual orientation, although some people do repress it. The most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to change your sexual orientation, as the process can actually be damaging.

Same-sex relationships don't last. Same-sex couples can, and do, form lasting, lifelong, committed relationships — just like any other couples. And just like any other couples, sometimes same-sex relationships end. The primary difference is that same-sex couples have fewer opportunities to marry or enter into the same legal and societal relationships than straight couples, therefore denying them the access to equal rights, protections and responsibilities that come with marriage, civil unions, etc.

LGBT people can't have families. According to the 2010 Census, more than 2 million children — probably many more — are being raised by same-sex couples nationwide. The American Psychological Association and other major medical and scientific researchers have stated that children of lesbian, gay and transgender parents are as mentally healthy as children raised by straight parents.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

NATIONAL LGBT ORGANIZATIONS

American Veterans for Equal Rights
www.aver.us

Bisexual Resource Center
617-424-9595
www.biresource.net

Centerlink: The Community of LGBT Centers
954-765-6024
www.lgbtcenters.org

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere
415-861-5437
www.colage.org

Family Equality Council
617-502-8700
www.familyequality.org

Gay Asian Pacific Support Network
213-368-6488
www.gapsn.org

Gay & Lesbian Medical Association
202-600-8037
www.glma.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network
212-727-0135
www.glsen.org

Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation
212-629-3322
www.glaad.org

Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund
202-842-8679
www.victoryfund.org

Human Rights Campaign
202-628-4160 or 800-777-4723
TTY 202-216-1572
www.hrc.org

Immigration Equality
202-714-2904
www.immigrationequality.org

Lambda Legal
212-809-8585
www.lambdalegal.org

National Association of People with AIDS
240-247-0880
www.napwa.org

National Black Justice Coalition
202-319-1552
www.nbjcoalition.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights
415-392-6257
www.nclrights.org

National Center for Transgender Equality
202-903-0112
www.transequality.org

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force
202-393-5177
www.thetaskforce.org

National Minority AIDS Council
202-483-6622
www.nmac.org

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
202-467-8180
www.pflag.org
www.straightforequality.org

Servicemembers Legal Defense Network
202-328-3244
www.sldn.org

Straight Spouse Network
201-825-7763
www.straightspouse.org

Trevor Project
310-271-8846
www.thetrevorproject.org

RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Affirmation (Mormon)
661-367-2421
www.affirmation.org

Affirmation (United Methodist)
www.umaffirm.org

Al-Fatiha Foundation (Muslim)
202-452-5534
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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Association of Welcoming & Affirming Baptists
240-242-9220
www.wabaptists.org

DignityUSA (Catholic)
800-877-8797 or 202-861-0017
www.dignityusa.org

Emergence International (Christian Scientist)
www.emergence-international.org

Evangelicals Concerned Western Region
202-621-8960
www.ecwr.org

Gay Buddhist Fellowship
415-207-8113
www.gaybuddhist.org

Integrity USA (Episcopalian)
800-462-9498 or 585-360-4512
www.integrityusa.org

Lutherans Concerned / North America
651-665-0861
www.lcna.org

More Light Presbyterians
505-820-7082
www.mlp.org

Rainbow Baptists
240-515-8664
www.rainbowbaptists.org

Seventh-Day Adventist Kinship International
www.sdakinship.org

Soulforce
888-326-5610
www.soulforce.org

Unitarian Universalists Association Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian, and Transgender Concerns
617-948-6461
www.uua.org/obgltc

United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns
800-653-0799 or 216-861-0779
www.ucccoalition.org

Metropolitan Community Churches
310-360-8640
www.mccchurch.org

Unity Fellowship Church Movement (African American)
323-938-8322
www.unityfellowshipchurch.org

World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews
202-452-7424
www.glbtjews.org

HOTLINES

The Trevor Helpline
866-4-U-TREVOR (866-488-7386)

National Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline
800-347-TEEN (800-347-8336)

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

CDC Information Line
800-CDC-INFO (800-232-4636)

A THANK YOU

Thank you for taking time to read and think about *Coming Out As A Straight Supporter, A Guide to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Americans*, published by the Human Rights Campaign and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.

For many of us, coming out was initially a daunting process. Often, it was hard to start the conversation, and even harder for the people we were telling to know what questions to ask or how to show support.

Ultimately, we and the people in our lives — our families, friends, co-workers and acquaintances — all learned through time and practice that having those conversations and finding ways to be open, to ask questions and share our feelings were important steps to having honest, genuine relationships with one another.

This guide has been written to help straight people feel comfortable asking questions so that they can build understanding and, ultimately, support for the LGBT people in their lives.

Some of you reading this guide will be taking one of your very first steps in learning about LGBT people, while others will have more experience and understanding. Please feel free to take the pieces that apply to you, and leave the rest behind. You may want to explore the resources at the end of this guide for more information.

This guide has also been designed to give many options for demonstrating your support in easy and convenient ways. We list these not to give a "hard push," but rather to give you choices.

Wherever you are on your journey, the Human Rights Campaign and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays are ready to help you on your path of understanding and support. Again, thank you and welcome.

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the original family and ally organization. Made up of parents, families, friends and allies uniting with LGBT people, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality and acceptance through its mission of support, education and advocacy. PFLAG has more than 350 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities and rural areas in all 50 states. To learn more, please visit *www.pflag.org*

Human Rights Campaign
The Human Rights Campaign's Coming Out Project is a program designed to help LGBT people come out and start living openly. As coming out is a lifelong journey, the HRC Coming Out Project also helps LGBT people, as well as straight allies, to live openly and talk about their support for equality at home, at work and in their communities each and every day. See www.hrc.org/comingout. HRC represents a grassroots force of more than 1 million members and supporters nationwide.

PFLAG
Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN FOUNDATION ™

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