

Tips for communicating with your child or loved one

In many cases, young people coming out will have had a long time to think about what they will say and how they will handle the situation. They may even have had professional or peer support. This is usually not the case for parents and family members. You may not know what to say or what questions to ask. This is common. It's OK to take your time, do some reading, talk to people and allow the conversations to happen over time.

When initiating conversations:

- Pick a suitable time and place. If the house is not suitable, find a neutral calm place outside the house, such as a park or quiet café.
- Make sure you have time. If you start to open up to each other, it would be a shame to have to cut it short to do other things.
- Understand that after coming out, a person may need some time alone and may not be ready to talk. Let them know that when they are ready, you will be there. You may need to try again gently at a later date. Don't give up.
- Don't initiate conversations when you are feeling upset or anxious. Try to find time when you are feeling calm. It's OK for you to get support elsewhere if you need to talk things through first.
- When talking to your child, encourage them to talk freely, remain quiet and let them direct the conversation. If they feel like it's an interrogation, it will diminish their willingness to talk.

'Door-opening' questions to get the conversation going

- Sometimes, asking about others' experiences is less confronting than asking your child and loved one about themselves. You could ask questions such as, "Do you know other young people who are LGBTQ?", "How has it been for them?" or "Have you read any books about LGBTQ young people or their parents? What do they talk about?"

- "Is there anything I can do to help you or make things easier for you?"
- "Do you have any friends you would like me or the rest of our family to meet? They are always welcome to come over to our place."
- "Are there any books or websites you would like me to read?" Or perhaps tell your child or loved one about books or resources you have read and what you thought.
- "Is there anything you'd like me to know that I don't already know?"

Showing support — common thoughts and questions

I think that my child or loved one might be attracted to people of the same sex, but they haven't said anything to me. Should I ask them?

It's important to let young people take the lead about what they choose to tell you. Your child or loved one will talk to you about their sexuality when the time is right for them. The most helpful thing parents or loved ones can do for children is to create an environment where children know they will be supported no matter who they are. Challenge any negative statements you hear about LGBTQ people and make it clear you are OK with LGBTQ people.

I don't know anything about LGBTQ life. How can I support my child or loved one?

It's OK that you may not know much about LGBTQ life; you can still celebrate your child or loved one's achievements with them and be involved in important milestones in their life. You can learn about LGBTQ life from your child or loved one, their friends and their partners just by being interested in and engaged with their lives. You can also support them through periods of difficulty or heartache as you would any other child. Most relationship experiences are similar for both LGBTQ and heterosexual people – draw on your own experience to give advice and support.