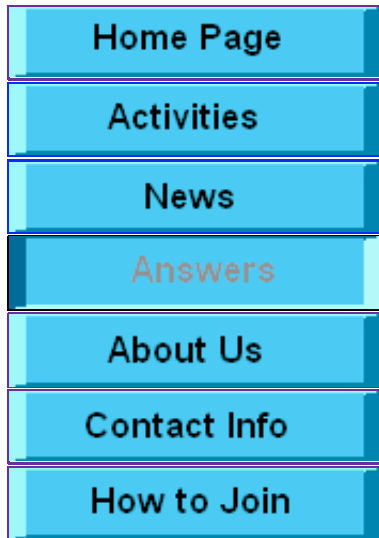


We have answers

Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

- [PFLAG-USA](#)
- [PFLAG-NM](#)
- [PFLAG-Abq](#)
- [LINKS](#)



Here are answers to some Frequently Asked Questions

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Part of library, and a literature table..

## Is there something wrong with being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?

No. There have been people in all cultures and times throughout human history who have identified themselves as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender (GLBT). Homosexuality is not an illness or a disorder, a fact affirmed by the American Psychological Association and the American Psychiatric Association. Homosexuality was removed from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual (DSM) of the American Psychiatric Association in 1974. Being transgender or gender variant is not a disorder either, although Gender Identity Dysphoria (GID) is still listed in the DSM of the American Psychiatric Association. Being GLBT is as much a human variation as being left-handed -- sexual orientation and gender identity are just another piece of who people are. There is nothing wrong with being GLBT -- in fact, there's a lot to celebrate.

What is wrong are discriminatory laws, policies and attitudes that persist in our schools, workplaces, places of worship and larger communities. PFLAG works to make sure that GLBT people have full civil rights and can live openly, free from discrimination and violence.

## What is sexual orientation?

A person's sexual orientation is defined by enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to other people. Heterosexual (or straight) refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are primarily for people of the opposite sex. Homosexual (or gay and lesbian) refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are primarily for those of the same sex. The term lesbian refers to women who are homosexual. Bisexual (or bi) refers to people whose sexual and romantic feelings are for people of both sexes. Other terms that people use to describe their sexual orientation are "queer" and "questioning."

## What is gender identity and expression?

Gender identity is a sense of being male or female. Gender expression is how people present their gender to the world. We all have a gender identity, and we all have ways of expressing it. Our society has a narrow view of what it means to be a woman or a man, and we learn that from an early age. Those who are visibly gender-variant face increased risks: of harassment in school, unemployment, homelessness, hate-violence, lack of access to health care, and loss of custody of their children. But many people create supportive communities where they can be who they are. PFLAG envisions a society that embraces everyone, including those of diverse gender identities.

## What does transgender mean?

Transgender peoples' gender identities or expressions differ from conventional expectations for their physical sex. The term "transgender" is used to describe several distinct but related groups of people who use a variety of terms to identify themselves: Transgender people can include transsexuals (though not all transgendered people need or want sex reassignment surgery), masculine women, feminine men, drag queens/kings, cross-dressers, gender queers, two-spirit, butches, transmen, transwomen, etc. Like other people, transgender people can be straight, gay, lesbian or bisexual. To find out more about transgender click here ([PFLAG Transgender Network](#)). To read PFLAG's policy on transgender inclusion in legislation, click [here](#).

## Who are intersex people?

Intersex people are individuals born with an anatomy or physiology that differs from cultural and/or medical ideals of male and female. The medical term "hermaphrodite" has been commonly used, but is not accepted by many intersex people. It is standard medical practice to assign a sex at birth to individuals born with intersex/atypical anatomy or physiology -- and then to perform surgeries beginning in infancy (often continuing into adolescence before a child is able to give informed consent. The [Intersex Society of North America](#) has labeled this practice as genital mutilation and opposes surgery on infants and children. Click [here](#) to find PFLAG's policy on Intersex persons. Another good source of information about intersex issues is [Bodies Like Ours](#).

## How are sexual orientation and gender identity determined?

No one knows exactly how sexual orientation and gender identity are determined.

However, experts agree that it is a complicated combination of genetic, biological, psychological and social factors. For most people, sexual orientation and gender identity are shaped at an early age. While research has not determined a cause, homosexuality and gender variance are not the result of any one factor like parenting or past experiences. It is never anyone's "fault" if a loved-one grows up to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. If you are asking yourself why you or your loved one is GLBT, consider asking yourself another question: Does your response to your GLBT person depend on knowing why he or she is GLBT? Regardless of cause, GLBT people deserve equal rights and to be treated fairly.

## Can gay people change their sexual orientation or gender identity?

There are religious and secular organizations which sponsor campaigns and studies suggesting that GLBT people can change their sexual orientation or gender identity. Their assertions assume that there is something wrong with being GLBT. The real problem is, in fact, society's intolerance of differences. PFLAG believes that our anti-GLBT attitudes, laws and policies need to change, not our loved ones.

Many of the studies and campaigns suggesting that GLBT people can change are based on ideologies and doctrines, not science. Claims of "conversion" from gay to straight are poorly documented and full of flawed research. No studies show proven long-term changes in gay or transgender people, and many reported changes are based solely on behavior and not a person's actual self-identity. The American Psychological Association has stated that scientific evidence shows that so-called "reparative therapy" (therapy which claims to change GLBT people) does not work, and that it can do more harm than good. For more on "reparative therapy," click this link to [a pflag article](#).

## How do people know that they are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?

Some people say that they have "felt different" -- or knew that they were attracted to people of the same sex -- from the time they were very young. Some transgender people talk about feeling, from an early age, that their gender identity did not match parental and social expectations. Others do not figure out their sexual orientation or gender identity until they are adolescents or adults. It can often take a while for people to put a label to their feelings, or people's feelings may change over time. Understanding sexuality and gender can be a life-long process, and people shouldn't worry about labeling themselves. However, with positive images of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people more readily available, it is becoming easier for people to identify their feelings and to "come out" (accept their feelings) at earlier ages. People don't have to be sexually active to know their sexual orientation: Feelings and emotions are as much a part of one's identity as one's actions. The short answer is: You'll know when you know.

## How do I come out to my family and friends?

There are many questions to consider before "coming out" (admitting one's identity to others as well as oneself). Are you comfortable with your sexuality and gender identity/expression? Do you have support? Can you be patient? What kind of views do your friends and family have about homosexuality and gender variance? Are you financially dependent on your family?

Make sure that you have considered your decision, and that you have a plan and have supportive people you can turn to. Be prepared for the stages that your family or loved ones may go through while coming to understand that you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Coming out can cause shock, denial, guilt and grief. PFLAG was founded because of the unconditional love of parents for their gay children. Your loved ones will need time to adjust to your news, the same way you may have needed time to come to terms with yourself. However, true acceptance is possible, especially with education and support. You may wish to read a brochure from OutProud.org (["Read This Before Coming Out to Your Parents"](#)).

## What do I do if someone comes out to me? How can I support my GLBT loved one?

Learning that a loved one is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender can be a difficult discovery. It can send you on an emotional "roller coaster" ride. You may feel like you have lost him or her. Remember that this person is the same person who you have loved before. Feelings of grief, guilt and denial are reasonable given our society's attitudes towards homosexuality and gender variance. However, you owe it to your loved one, and yourself, to move towards acceptance and understanding. Whatever your reaction, reassure your loved ones that they still have your love. PFLAG offers **local support** and **education** to help with that process. You may wish to read a PFLAG article "[Dos and Don'ts for Families & Friends](#)."

## Can gay people have families?

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people have families. Same-sex couples form committed and loving relationships. In the United States many same-sex couples choose to celebrate their love with commitment ceremonies or civil unions, although these couples are not offered **the rights and benefits of marriage**. Currently, in Vermont, same-sex couples can have a state civil union -- that offers some of the benefits of marriage -- to resident couples, and the Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Council has ruled that under Massachusetts law the state cannot discriminate against same sex couples in the distribution of marriage licenses. In the State of California, state law provides many (but not all) of the benefits of marriage to registered domestic partners irrespective of whether they are composed of opposite or same sex couples. More and more GLBT couples are also raising children together, although state laws on adoption and foster parenting vary. And of course, many GLBT people have the support of the loving families they were born into, or the families that they have created with their other friends and loved ones.

## How can I reconcile my or my loved one's sexual orientation

## with my faith?

This is a difficult question for many people. Learning that a loved one is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender can be a challenge if you feel that this fact is at odds with your faith or tradition. However, being GLBT does not impact a person's ability to be moral and spiritual any more than being heterosexual does. Many GLBT people are religious and active in their own faith communities. It is up to you to explore, question and make choices in order to reconcile religion with homosexuality and gender variance. For some this means working for change within their faith community, and for others it means leaving it. There are many [resources](#) to help you in this journey.

## What about HIV/AIDS?

Since the HIV/AIDS epidemic surfaced in the '80s, many people have viewed HIV/AIDS as a gay issue. The GLBT community mobilized quickly to respond: that response included educating communities, creating visibility to reduce stigma, developing prevention strategies, and advocating for appropriate care and treatment options for People Living with AIDS (PLWAs). The epidemic has continued globally. Despite overwhelming statistics documenting the spread of HIV/AIDS in other communities, many people still choose to view HIV/AIDS as solely a gay issue, which it is not.

Being GLBT does not give anyone AIDS. Certain sexual practices, certain drug use behaviors and other factors, can put people at greater risk for catching the virus that causes AIDS -- as well as other sexually transmitted diseases (STDs). Everyone should get the facts about HIV/AIDS.

HIV is spread by sexual contact with an infected person, by sharing needles and/or syringes (primarily for drug injection) with someone who is infected, or, less commonly (rarely), through transfusions of infected blood or blood clotting factors. Babies born to HIV-infected women may become infected during birth or through breast-feeding after birth. Though research has revealed a great deal of valuable information, a lot of false or misleading information, often fueled by homophobia, continues to be shared widely through the Internet or popular press. Be sure to consider the source when educating yourself about HIV/AIDS.

If your loved one is presently HIV-positive or has AIDS, he or she needs your support more than ever. You should know that you are not alone. There are numerous local and national organizations that can help you with medical, psychological and physical care. PFLAG can refer you to other parents, families and friends in similar situations, and resources specific to your needs.

## Why should I support gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights?

GLBT rights are not "special" rights. PFLAG works to achieve **equal** civil rights for all people, including our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) loved ones.

PFLAG asks you to stand up, to join us in our work. Our GLBT children, friends and family members deserve the same rights as our straight ones. Discrimination, based on sexual orientation and gender identity, is still legal in many states. GLBT people can still be fired from their jobs simply because of who they love or how they express their gender. Same sex couples cannot legally be married in the majority of states in the United States. GLBT youth face constant harassment and abuse in schools across the country. The road to full equality and acceptance is a long one.

Your loved one needs you to take a stand for fairness. Being open about yourself and your family will help to dispel misinformation and fear. You can take the next step by **joining your local PFLAG chapter** as we support, educate and advocate for a better world.

### **How should I approach (and support) a youth whom I think may be gay?**

A perception of someone's sexual orientation or gender identity is not always accurate. To offer support -- for being "gay" -- to people who is not gay (or who are still trying to work out whether they are gay or not) could be counter-productive. Unless people actually say that they are "gay" or not, we cannot know.

DO let people know that, for you, being "gay is OK." Be willing to talk about gay marriage and gay rights, and promote an acceptance of "gay." This will let people know that, if they are gay, they can trust you.

It is seldom appropriate to ask anyone, "Are you gay?" Given social norms of our time, anyone could be frightened by the directness of question. BUT, if people feel secure around you, and want you to know, they will tell you in their own good time.

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