

When Your Child “Comes Out”

Learning that one’s child is homosexual, lesbian, bisexual or transsexual can be a tremendous shock to a parent. In fact, many youths anticipate that the information will distress their parents and have a negative impact on their relationship with the parents. Hence most youths avoid disclosure, seeking to spare themselves and parents the upset. However, these same youths then deal with feelings of inferiority and shame, the likes of which can undermine academic and vocational performance. In view of these situations and feelings, some youths seek to leave home early by schooling away or simply by living in a distant community. Others may become despondent and turn to drugs or alcohol to “self-medicate.” Staying *in* then becomes self-destructive.

Most parents are well intentioned though and in the end want their children to be happy, functional and productive. In view of healthy parental intentions, parents must come to understand that a child’s sexual orientation has less to do with the child’s happiness, functionality or productiveness than does parental acceptance of their gender preference and/or sexual orientation.

All children draw their sense of strength, well-being and ability to take on the world on the basis of the care, love and acceptance experienced from their parents. As parents adapt to their child’s gender preference or sexual orientation, the child internalizes their support and thus are better equipped to manage the task of living in the greater world.

Children who do seek to come out to their parents however, must appreciate that in having good intentions for their child, view cross gender issues or same sex orientation as huge challenges that could undermine their child’s well-being. Hence while on the one hand the gender or sexual issues may be upsetting, the son or daughter must understand that parents realize there are greater challenges and barriers to persons with non-traditional gender or sexual orientations.

Interestingly enough, in a good many situations, some parents may have suspected that their child had a cross gender or same sex preference. When the child finally expresses him or herself, both child and parents may find relief.

If you are a youth seeking to come out to your parents and you are having difficulty doing so, consider asking support from another trusted adult. This could be a teacher, counsellor, clergy or other adult whom your parents view as reasonable. It may be helpful to have that person present to discuss this matter and your fears.

If you are the parent on the receiving end of such information, remember, your child actually needs you now more than ever. While you may initially take issue, throughout remember that it took tremendous courage on your child’s part to broach the subject with you. Your support will be essential to how your child then goes on to manage him or herself with others. If as a parent you do not handle the initial meeting well, you can always return to discuss matters further. It is never too late to let a child know you love them.

Lastly, parents must be informed that they cannot talk their child out of their gender preference or sexual orientation. This will remain who they are. The only question that will remain is whether parent-child relationships will remain intact.

The well-intentioned parent will see that they do.

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