

# KNOW! How To Respond Supportively When Someone Comes Out To You



## NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY

October 11

October 11th is National Coming Out Day! Although LGBTQ+ folks can choose to come out or not come out at any time, young people may use this day to start a conversation about their LGBTQ+ identity. No matter how or when your loved one chooses to come out to you, it's important to respond with positivity and support.

Research by The Family Acceptance Project found that family behaviors that try to change, prevent, deny, or minimize their child's LGBTQ+ identity have a negative impact on their child's health and well-being. Those behaviors can contribute to depression, suicide, illegal drug use, and other serious health risks. Family behaviors that support their child help to promote self-esteem, overall health, and stronger relationships while helping to protect against suicidal behavior, depression, and substance abuse.

There is no one perfect way to react, however, your response will affect their well-being and your relationship with them moving forward. Responding supportively can make a significant positive impact on a young LGBTQ+ person's life.

### How can I respond supportively?

Express positivity and support with these tips from PFLAG:

- **Lead with love.** Remember that no matter how easy or difficult learning about your loved one's sexual orientation or gender identity is for you, it was probably challenging for them to come out to you, given the many fears and concerns that can arise.

- **Be reassuring.** Explain to them that revealing their sexual orientation or gender identity has not changed how you feel about them, even if it takes a little while to digest what they have told you. Remind them that you still care for and respect them as much as you ever have or more.
- **Speak with and listen to them about their LGBTQ+ identity.** Give them ample opportunity to share their thoughts and feelings, whether they want to talk about their hopes for the future or a situation that happened in school or at work that day. If you make a misstep in your response, apologize; no one is perfect.
- **Support their LGBTQ+ identity even though you may feel uncomfortable.** This support can take a wide variety of forms, from welcoming their LGBTQ+ friends into your home, to taking them shopping for that just-right piece of clothing they've been asking for, to helping provide access to age-appropriate resources, such as books and films. Showing an interest in their lives, inclusive of their whole selves, is a subtle but powerful way to show that you care.
- **Connect them with an LGBTQ+ role model.** If there are other LGBTQ+ people in your life, connecting your newly-out loved one with them offers the opportunity for them to see that you are comfortable being close to people who are LGBTQ+. The connection also gives youth the chance to see people who are LGBTQ+ living their lives positively, with friends and family who love them, which directly and positively affects their health and well-being.

- **Express your unconditional love for them.** Saying “I love you” is one obvious way to express your love. But it is true that actions speak louder than words and taking any—or all—of the steps above will help assure them that they have your love and support no matter what. And if you find yourself at a loss for words? A simple hug can be the best response.

- **disparaging LGBTQ+ people you see in the media**
- **telling the LGBTQ+ loved one that they are being too sensitive when you do one of the above**

It may take time to break some old habits but making your best effort and acknowledging and apologizing for missteps is a real demonstration of love and thoughtfulness. It is never too late to respond with love and support. The important thing is that you are working towards understanding and centering the needs of your loved one.

### What should I avoid?

Overt negative actions such as hitting your loved one, name-calling, bullying them, or kicking them out of the house are the most obvious negative responses to avoid. But even the most well-meaning parent or caretaker can act in ways that are subtly unsupportive or negative. Actions such as those listed below can cause harm to your LGBTQ+ loved one:

- **blocking access to LGBTQ+ friends, events, or resources**
- **making a child keep their LGBTQ+ identity a secret from other family members or friends and not letting them talk about it**
- **pressuring a child to conform to more stereotypical gender expression or behavior**
- **making or sharing a joke that seems innocuous to you**

Remember: Your loved one is the same person they were before they came out to you. What has (perhaps) changed is your perception of your loved one, the hopes or goals you had for them, or the understanding you thought you had of their inner world. This is not an end to your dreams for your child or loved one, nor is it the end of your relationship. Take the time you need to explore your feelings. You can emerge from this period with a stronger relationship with your loved one than you had before and arrive in a place that is better than where you started -- closer to your loved one, closer to your family, and closer to a vibrant community of people you might never have known existed.

## Feel free to check out these resources!

### General:

- [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\) Resources](#)
- [CDC's LGBTQ Youth Resources](#)
- [HRC's Glossary of Terms](#)
- [GLAAD's Guide to Terminology](#)

### For Young LGBTQ+ Folks:

- [The Trevor Project](#)
- [Coming Out Handbook](#)
- [HRC's Coming Out Resources](#)

### For Family and Friends:

- [Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays \(PFLAG\)](#)
- [HRC's Guide to Being an LGBTQ Ally](#)
- [Supporting Your Young Gender Non-Conforming Child](#)
- [Our Children: Questions and Answers for Parents and Families of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Question People](#)
- [What to Do \(and Not Do\) When Your Child Comes Out to You](#)
- [The Family Acceptance Project](#)

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