



Healthy matters to keep in mind.

Life Balance

June 2013

A Courageous Move! Coming Out is Not Easy for Anyone

Your son or daughter just sat you down and announced that he or she is gay or lesbian. While not all parents will have a negative reaction, some will experience shock. A range of emotions will storm through your head. Before you react, and possibly regret what you're about to say, take some time to think about what your child is telling you. It took an enormous amount of courage.

If You Think This is Tough for You...

Your gut reaction might focus on a range of issues. "It's not fair. I want grandchildren. What are the neighbors going to say? Are all your friends gay?"

What about your job? Your grandparents will have a heart attack."

Before you consider disowning him or her, or kicking your child out of your home, reflect on what you've been told. Your son or daughter thought hard about how to approach you and has tried to anticipate your reactions. He/she knows that communicating this information could dramatically change your relationship and that's not something he/she has taken lightly.

Here are some facts about being gay or lesbian that may help you understand what may seem like earth-shattering news to you and other family members.

Being Gay or Lesbian is Not a Choice

Sexual orientation refers to an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions that typically emerge between

middle childhood and early adolescence. And whether we choose to believe this or not, same-sex attraction and behavior is as much a normal aspect of human sexuality as heterosexual attraction and behavior.¹

Yes, some people would rather live a traditional heterosexual life than subject themselves and others to the painful challenges of rejection, expulsion and isolation typical of coming out. In this sense, yes, it's a choice — a choice of self-awareness and disclosure, of whether to communicate the truth or hide it. But that's about the extent of the choice a person can have in this case. Sexual orientation is not something we choose.

Acceptance is Needed

Digest the news, absorb the facts until you have a better understanding of where your child is coming from, and you are better prepared to react.

For More Information and Support

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays
<http://community.pflag.org>

GLBT National Help Center
<http://www.glnh.org>
GLBT National Hotline
(888) 843-4564
GLBT National Your Talkline
(800) 246-PRIDE

American Psychological Association
<http://www.apa.org>

American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP)
Division of Child and Adolescent Health
Office: (847) 228-5005
Fax: (847) 228-5097
<http://www.healthychildren.org/English/ages-stages/teen/dating-sex/Pages/Gay-Lesbian-and-Bisexual-Teens-Facts-for-Teens-and-Their-Parents.aspx>

Journal of Homosexuality
<http://www.tandfonline.com/toc/wjhm20/current>

SEAP

Call toll-free
(800) 692-7459
(800) 824-4306 TDD
or log on to
www.liveandworkwell.com
access code: Pennsylvania

In truth, the situation may not be as earth-shattering as you thought. Similar to other issues that arise in relationships, the best thing to do is communicate. Don't ignore or avoid the topic. Your son or daughter may see this as a sign of rejection, his worst fear. Have a chat. As human beings, we are validated by those we love and accept.

Feel the Love

It's likely that up to now you've loved this person greatly. So what changed since he made

his announcement? Don't let your pride and expectations slam shut the window to your heart. On the contrary, open it up even wider. Chances are, you'll not only experience more love and acceptance towards him and others, but more importantly, towards yourself.

Call your Employee Assistance Program for a consultation with a therapist. A professional will be able to offer meaningful support to you and your family and refer you to community resources.



The Six Stages of Coming Out

Coming out is a process that involves introspection and may require years of working through internal turmoil.

In 1979, Dr. Vivienne Cass, a clinical psychologist and sexual therapist, developed one of the first theories about gay and lesbian identity development. Her theory², while revised and updated throughout the years, is still relevant. Following are brief descriptions of these stages.

Stage 1: Identity Confusion

This is the "Who am I?" stage. The person may feel different from his/her peers and alienated, not able to discuss their confusion about same-sex feelings or behaviors they're experiencing.

Stage 2: Identity Comparison

"I may be gay. I may be bisexual. Maybe this is a temporary phase I'm going through," are some of the thoughts or feelings the person may have. A sense of isolation begins.

Stage 3: Identity Tolerance

In this stage, the person starts to think that, "I probably am gay/lesbian," and may contact other gay and lesbian individuals to thwart feelings of loneliness and alienation.

Stage 4: "Identity Acceptance"

Contact with other gay and/or lesbian individuals continues and friendships start to form. The person starts to accept rather than merely tolerate a lesbian or gay self-image.

Stage 5: "Identity Pride"

This is when the person identifies with being gay and/or lesbian and becomes highly aware of society's rejection of this orientation. The person may feel anger at heterosexuals for their expressed prejudice and discrimination, while also evidencing a strong sense of pride in his/her new gay or lesbian identity.

Stage 6: "Identity Synthesis"

There is a melding of the sexual identity with all other aspects of self, so that sexual orientation becomes only one aspect of self rather than the entire identity.

Resources

www.liveandworkwell.com

Visit the Live Well section for more information, tools, articles, self-help programs and resources related to life, family and relationships.

1 American Psychological Association. (2008). Answers to your questions: For a better understanding of sexual orientation and homosexuality. Washington, DC: Author. [Retrieved from www.apa.org/topics/orientation.pdf.] Copyright © 2008 American Psychological Association. (include dates and try to have all sources within two (2) years)

2 Cass, V. C. (1979). Homosexual identity formation: A theoretical model. *Journal of Homosexuality*, 4, 219-235.