

[Ten Tips for Parents of a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender Child](#)



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The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and not necessarily those of Advocates for Youth.

* **Please note:** These tips can also be useful for other trusted adults in the GLBT young person's life, explaining how a caring adult can be there for GLBT youth.

1. **Engage with your child.** Your gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender (GLBT) child requires and deserves the same level of care, respect, information, and support as non-GLBT children. Ask questions, listen, empathize, share and just be there for your child.
2. **Go back to school.** Get the facts about sexual orientation and gender identity. Learn new language and the correct terminology to communicate effectively about sexual orientation and gender identity. Challenge yourself to learn and to go beyond stereotyped images of GLBT people.



Here's a quick lesson on two frequently misunderstood terms:

Sexual orientation—Describes to whom a person feels attraction: people of the opposite gender, the same gender, or both genders.

Gender identity—A person's inner sense of gender—male, female, some of each, neither. Transgender people have a gender identity that is different from the gender to which they were born or assigned at birth.

Some people ask, "Isn't transgender just like being gay?" No. Transgender describes a person's internal sense of gender identity. Sexual orientation describes a person's feelings of attraction toward other people. Transgender people have some issues in common with gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities, but gender identity is **not** the same as sexual orientation.

3. **Get to know the community.** What resources are available? Find out if there is a Gay/Straight Alliance at school, a community group for GLBT and questioning teens, a bookstore with a selection of books and magazines on GLBT issues, or a GLBT community center nearby.
4. **Explore the Internet.** There is a growing amount of excellent information on the Internet that connects people with support and materials on these important topics. Three excellent Web sites are [Youth Resource](#), [Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays](#), and [Gay Lesbian and Straight Education Network](#). For a diverse selection of links to a variety of GLBT sites, including education, family, health and wellness, and multiple identities, visit Ithaca College's [Center for LGBT Education, Outreach and Services](#) and click on the "links" button.
5. **Find out where your local Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) meets.** Many parents say that their connections with other parents of GLBT kids made a world of difference in their progress toward understanding their young people. Finding another person you can trust to share your experience with is invaluable. Many people have gone through similar things and their support, lessons learned, and empathy can be very valuable.
6. **Don't make it ALL there is ...** just because your child has come out as GLBT does not mean the young person's whole world revolves around sexual orientation or gender identity. It will be a big part of who the youth is, especially during the process of figuring it all out, including what it means to be GLBT. Still, being GLBT isn't the sum of life for your child, and it is vital to encourage your child in other aspects of life, such as school, sports, hobbies, friends, and part-time jobs.
7. **ASK your child before you "come out" to others on the child's behalf.** Friends and family members might have questions or want to know what's up; but it is most important to be respectful of what your child wants. Don't betray your child's trust!
8. **Praise your GLBT child for coming to you to discuss this issue.** Encourage the youth to continue to keep you "in the know." If your child turns to you to share personal information, you're must be doing something right! You are askable.

You're sending out consistent verbal and non-verbal cues that say, "Yes, I'll listen. Please talk to me!" Give yourself some credit—your GLBT child chose to come out to you. Congratulations!

9. **Find out what kind of support, services, and education are in place at your child's school.** Does the school and/or school district have a non-discrimination policy? Is there a GLBT/straight support group? Do you know any "out" people, or their friends and loved ones, to whom you can turn for information? (Before doing so, again refer to tip number 7, above. Ask your child if it's okay for you to "come out" about the child.)
10. **Educate yourself on local, state and national laws and policies regarding GLBT people.** On the national level, GLBT people are still second-class citizens in regard to some national policies and their rights are not guaranteed by law. Consider educating yourself about this and finding out what you can do to work toward extending equal rights to GLBT people in the United States. A good place to start is the [National Gay and Lesbian Task Force](#).