



# ENGAGING FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES IN SUPPORT OF LGBTQ YOUTH

Families play a crucial role in a Club member's overall safety and well-being, serving as a protective factor for major health risks and negative outcomes. Research shows that LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or Queer) youth who have supportive families and communities have greater self-esteem and resilience and a lower risk of negative outcomes like depression, hopelessness and substance abuse. This brief guide is intended to help support families and communities in creating safe, positive and inclusive spaces for LGBTQ youth.



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## SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF LGBTQ YOUTH

Perceived lack of family support can negatively impact LGBTQ youth's overall well-being. Therefore, family support is critical in nurturing the social and emotional health of our members. It is important to provide support to LGBTQ members and their families so they can continue to support youth members. It may be helpful to think in terms of the Five Key Elements of Positive Youth Development:

**1 Create a safe and positive environment where families can share and reflect.** Families of LGBTQ children may not feel like they have the chance to express their fears and anxieties about how others will view and treat their child. Offering a safe environment so these conversations can take place help builds their understanding and confidence. Create guidelines for Club staff to interact with families in order to create this space.

**2 Expect to engage with families by meeting them where they are and provide opportunities for them to learn.** Every family will have their own dynamics and approach after learning that their child has identified as LGBTQ. Families who may be perceived as rejecting their LGBTQ child are sometimes motivated by concern and a desire for their child to be accepted by others. When engaging with families, provide support and meet them where they are by building on their existing strengths and providing opportunities for them to become more aware of how their responses may affect their child.

**3 Help families build on their existing supportive relationship with their child.** Families who believe that LGBTQ is wrong can still support their child by modifying behaviors that might be perceived as rejection. Focus on helping families understand that they don't have to agree with the behavior, but they can still provide love and support to their child. Provide resources to families that help educate them on behaviors that might be perceived as harmful or helpful.

**LESS THAN  
50%**  
of LGBT youth  
report experiences  
of harassment to  
their family

**4**

**Recognize that providing support is a continuous process and that every step is a success.** Making small changes in behaviors that could be perceived as rejection can go a long way in demonstrating love and support. Recognizing progression along the way is an important step in continuing to help families build a supportive environment for LGBTQ youth.

**5**

**Provide fun opportunities at Clubs, and connect families with resources to help them engage in activities with their LGBTQ child.** Have fun activities and events where families of LGBTQ youth are encouraged to interact with other families at your Club. Also provide them with referrals to LGBTQ organizations where they can participate in events with their child and possibly connect with other families of LGBTQ youth in their community.

**For more information, check out these helpful resources:**

- 10 Tips for Parents of a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender Child  
Advocates for Youth  
<http://bit.ly/2nhx7mv>
- Resources for Heterosexual Parents of LGBT Children  
True Colors  
<http://bit.ly/2mQGN4U>
- PFLAG – Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays  
<http://bit.ly/2mXfurg>
- A Practitioners Resource Guide: Helping Families to Support Their LGBT Children  
SAMHSA  
<http://bit.ly/2jsZ9rb>

## PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR LGBTQ PARENTS AND CAREGIVERS

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Club members, regardless of their sexuality, may also have parents and caregivers who identify as LGBTQ. It is also important to create a space where these family members feel welcomed and included in Club activities. Staff can once again consider the Five Key Elements to help in supporting LGBTQ parents and caregivers.

**Create a safe and positive environment where families feel welcomed and included.** LGBTQ family members often get overlooked, and do not feel included or accepted. Use the following practices to ensure Club members that their LGBTQ family members are welcome in the Club:

- Ask family members how they would like to be addressed and how their children address them.
- Use inclusive wording on forms and pictures to show different types of families.
- Create guidelines and training for Club staff to ensure all families are welcome.

**Provide opportunities for LGBTQ families to incorporate their perspectives.**

Ask LGBTQ family members what they need from Clubs to feel more included. Consider including an LGBTQ individual on your board or on a committee to ensure inclusiveness is a part of all Club activities.

**Help LGBTQ families build supportive relationships with other Club families and Club staff.** Make sure Club staff builds relationships with all families and continues to make LGBTQ families welcome. The membership application can also be a time to learn more about the dynamics of LGBTQ families and discuss what types of support they need.

**Recognize and acknowledge the contributions of the LGBTQ community.**

Incorporate the accomplishments of current and historical LGBTQ figures by sharing and/or displaying them in Clubs. This can also show your Club's inclusivity of all families.

**Provide fun opportunities at Clubs and connect families with LGBTQ friend events.** There are many things you can do to provide activities. Invite LGBTQ families to volunteer at the Club, or ask them to share their stories with staff. Partner with a LGBTQ family and join a task force together. Connect them with The Family Equality Council ([www.familyequality.org](http://www.familyequality.org)) if they are in need of more support. Design fun activities and events where they feel welcomed, and create opportunities where they can interact with other LGBTQ family parents and caregivers.

## WAYS FAMILIES CAN SUPPORT THEIR LGBTQ CHILDREN

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Some families may not know how to react when they learn that a family member identifies as LGBTQ. There are also behaviors or comments that families do make that they think are supportive, but they may be perceived by LGBTQ youth as a rejection. Below are some behaviors that may help families show support for their child, and some behaviors that may be perceived as a rejection.

### **Behaviors that may be perceived as rejection:**

- Telling your child that their LGBTQ identity is a phase they will grow out of.
- Isolating your LGBTQ child from family members and excluding them from family activities.
- Verbally harassing your child because of their LGBTQ identity.
- Blaming your child when they are discriminated against because of their LGBTQ identity.
- Blocking your child's access to other LGBTQ friends or LGBTQ-friendly events.
- Physically hurting your child because of their LGBTQ identity.
- Telling your child that you are ashamed of them because of their LGBTQ identity.
- Making your child keep their LGBTQ identity a secret and not letting them talk about it.

### **Behaviors that may demonstrate support:**

- Talking with your child about their LGBTQ identity.
- Expressing affection when you learn that your child identifies as LGBTQ.
- Supporting your child's LGBTQ identity, even if you feel uncomfortable, in order to demonstrate that you still love and support your child even if you may not support his/her lifestyle choices.
- Advocating for your child when they are mistreated because of their LGBTQ identity.
- Requiring that other family members respect your LGBTQ child.
- Bringing your child to LGBTQ organizations or events.
- Connecting your child with an LGBTQ adult role model to show them options for the future.
- Finding a supportive faith community that welcomes your family and LGBTQ child.
- Welcoming your child's LGBTQ friends and parents to your home and family activities.
- Supporting your child's gender expression.
- Believing that your child can have a happy future as a LGBTQ adult.

### **For more information, check out this helpful resource:**

- Supportive Families, Healthy Children: Helping Families with Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Children  
Family Acceptance Project – San Francisco State University  
<http://bit.ly/2k5qeQc>

## WAYS FAMILIES CAN SUPPORT THEIR CHILDREN COMING OUT

Families can also demonstrate support for their LGBTQ child through their coming-out process. They may not know all the “right” things to say. However, the important thing to understand is that their support is crucial to ensuring their child feels loved and accepted.

### **Some tips a family can use if their LGBTQ family wants to come out:**

- Many families feel that they are alone. Know that you are not alone in this process. There are many resources that can help you find friends and allies.
- Let your child know that it takes courage and strength for them to come out.
- Praise your child for sharing this information with you and for keeping you involved in the process.
- Ask your child how they are feeling, and find out how you can help them during this process.
- Be honest with your child about any feelings you may have about them coming out, while still emphasizing that you support them.
- Ask your child before you “out” them. Let them tell you how they want to come out, who they want to come out to, and how they want you to share this information.
- Confirm the support services available at your child’s school, including their discrimination and bullying policies, support groups at school, and other LGBTQ parents and caregivers at the school who can serve as a resource to other families.
- Ensure that your child’s coming out is not the only part of their identity. Gender identity and sexual orientation are not the only parts of a child’s life. Recognize that this is just one component. Do not make this the only focus of your child and who they are as a person.
- Stick up for your child if they are being harassed by other family members, neighbors or friends, once they have come out.
- Learn the local resources in your community, as well as the national resources available to your family.

### **For more information, check out this helpful resource:**

- Families Supporting an LGBTQ Child  
CWLA & Lambda Legal  
<http://bit.ly/2jQWcAs>

## STRATEGIES FOR ENGAGING THE COMMUNITY AROUND LGBTQ ISSUES

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Clubs can continue to spread community awareness LGBTQ youth and support LGBTQ members.

### Here are some strategies that you can use to engage your community:

- Create and distribute a resource guide for families, including local and national resources for LGBTQ members and their families. You can use the resource guide in the Appendix as a template.
- Have staff participate in LGBTQ awareness training, such as gender spectrum education. Invite families and community members to join the classes for awareness.
- Partner with a local LGBTQ organization to create training and support for Club staff, members and families.
- Develop and host LGBTQ awareness activities at your Club that are open to the community, particularly during national awareness initiatives such as National Bullying Prevention Month or Mental Health Awareness Month.
- Organize Club activities around Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) national campaigns and events. Major annual community campaigns include:
  - **No-Name Calling Week:** Held annually in September. A week of educational activities aimed at ending name-calling of all kinds. Provides tools and inspiration to launch an on-going dialogue about ways to eliminate bullying in your community. Participants across the country celebrate kindness by teaching respect and community. <http://bit.ly/2k7LVmG>
  - **Day of Silence:** Held annually in mid-April. A day of silence to call attention to the silencing effect of anti-LGBTQ bullying and harassment among young people. Hundreds of thousands of young people across the country and around the world take part in this youth-led action to educate their communities, encouraging others to address the problem of anti-LGBTQ behavior. <http://bit.ly/2jsZWbu>
- Design a community service project with Club members that focuses on addressing LGBTQ issues, creating awareness and respect.
- Hold a Community Fair to focus on LGBTQ issues and health risks. Share the ways your Club provides support, and have an open dialogue about how the community can provide support.
- Create a community conversation series with different topic areas such as families speaking about their experiences, youth activists sharing their stories, or advocacy groups sharing steps to create awareness and change.
- Display LGBTQ safe space stickers or pins during Club-sponsored events that take place in the community.

**GREAT FUTURES START HERE.**



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