



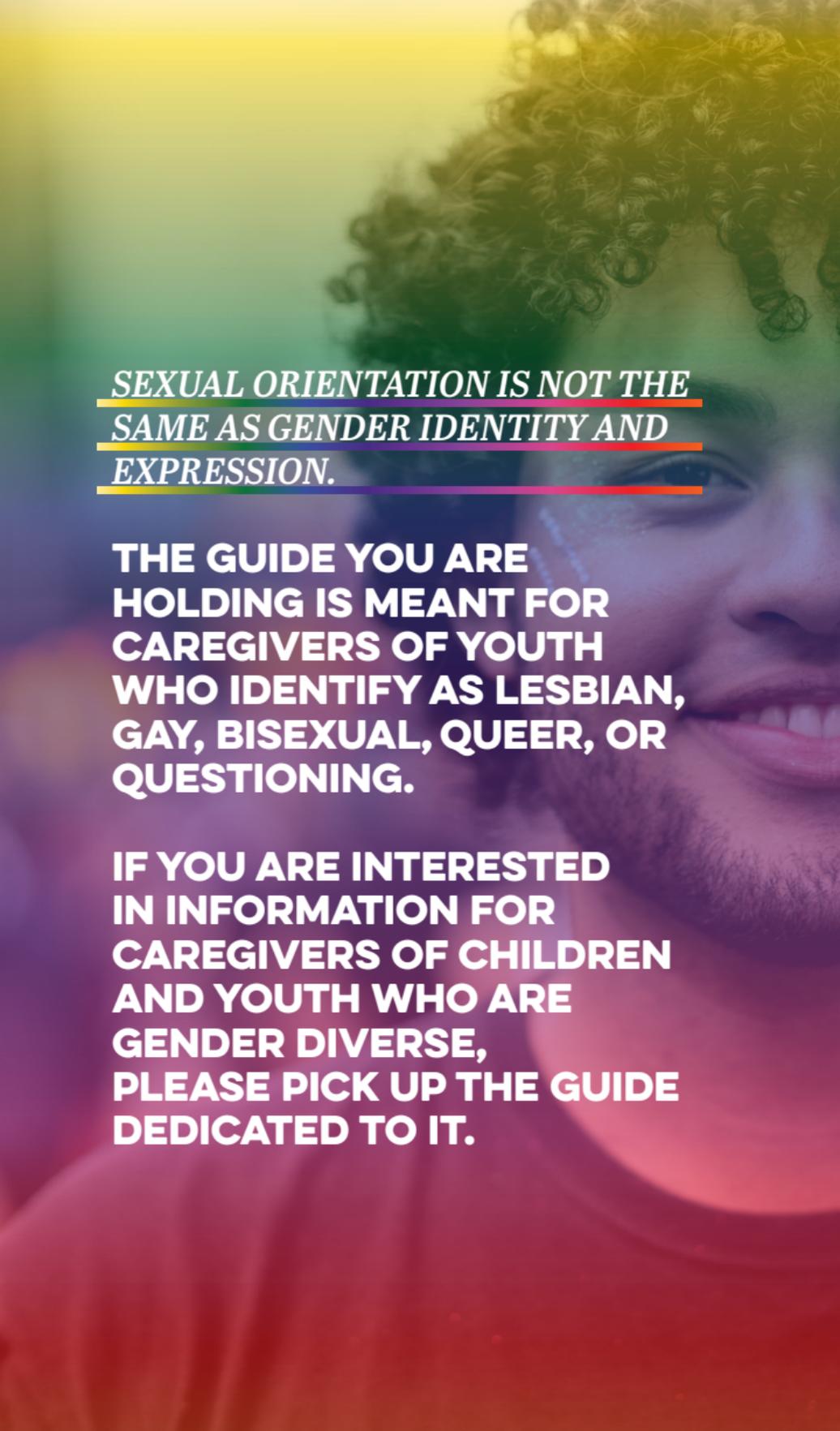
HAPPY AND HEALTHY:
**A CAREGIVERS'
GUIDE FOR**

LESBIAN, GAY,

BISEXUAL, QUEER

OR QUESTIONING

YOUTH



*SEXUAL ORIENTATION IS NOT THE
SAME AS GENDER IDENTITY AND
EXPRESSION.*

**THE GUIDE YOU ARE
HOLDING IS MEANT FOR
CAREGIVERS OF YOUTH
WHO IDENTIFY AS LESBIAN,
GAY, BISEXUAL, QUEER, OR
QUESTIONING.**

**IF YOU ARE INTERESTED
IN INFORMATION FOR
CAREGIVERS OF CHILDREN
AND YOUTH WHO ARE
GENDER DIVERSE,
PLEASE PICK UP THE GUIDE
DEDICATED TO IT.**

WHAT DOES “SEXUAL ORIENTATION” MEAN, ANYWAY?

Sexual orientation can be thought of in three main parts.

SEXUAL ATTRACTION:

who you are interested in pursuing a physical and/or sexual relationship with.

SEXUAL BEHAVIOR:

the person/people you engage in a physical and/or sexual relationship with.

SEXUAL IDENTITY:

the label that people adopt to identify themselves internally, and to others.

Sexual orientation is about who you're attracted to and who you feel drawn to. It is an enduring pattern of romantic or sexual attraction, or a combination of both, to a person or people of: a different sex/gender, the same sex/gender, to more than one gender, or none.

Most children develop a sense of who they are attracted to around age 10*. Most children also identify as straight. But for some children, their experience is different from many of their peers.

Variation is normal in the human experience and does not mean something is “wrong” with a child. Exploring and understanding their sexual orientation helps children know themselves better.

If you are the caregiver of an LGBTQ child or youth, this guide is for you.

WHAT DO ALL THESE WORDS MEAN?

ASEXUAL: A person with little to no interest in sexual activity or attraction.

BISEXUAL: An umbrella term for people who recognize their potential for sexual and/or emotional attraction to more than one gender.

GAY: An identity term used by some men who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to men. Sometimes used by the general public to refer to all people who are attracted to people of the same gender.

LESBIAN: Women who are sexually and/or emotionally attracted to women.

PANSEXUAL: An identity term used by some people who recognize and honor their potential to be sexually and/or emotionally attracted to another person, regardless of gender identity.

QUEER: A historically derogatory word in the process of being reclaimed by the LGBTQ community as an umbrella term for LGBTQ identities. The term may also be used to describe an individual identity in which one experiences a fluid or flexible gender and/or sexuality, or rejects the use of other labels.

QUESTIONING: An individual who or time when someone is unsure about or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity.

STRAIGHT: A person who is attracted to people of the “opposite” gender. Alternately referred to as “heterosexual.”

***IT IS IMPORTANT TO DISTINGUISH
BETWEEN GENDER IDENTITY &
EXPRESSION, AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION.***

GENDER IDENTITY & EXPRESSION:

The ways in which a person identifies and/or expresses their gender, including self-image, appearance, and embodiment or rejection of gender roles.

***EVERYONE HAS A SEXUAL ORIENTATION
AND A GENDER IDENTITY.***

On average, children generally have a firm understanding of their gender identity between the ages of 3 and 5 and their sexual orientation around age 10, although

everyone's experience is different. There is no "normal" time for every person to understand these things about themselves.

YOUR CHILD'S WELLBEING IS IN YOUR HANDS

As a parent or caregiver, we know that you want your child to be healthy, safe, and happy. Luckily, there are many things that you can do toward this goal by providing support, acceptance, information, protection, and guidance.

While you cannot control all aspects of the outside world, family environments of affirmation and love play a crucial role in helping LGB children lead healthy, happy, and safe lives.



Research shows that families and caregivers have a major impact on their LGBT children's risk and wellbeing. Compared with LGBT young people who were not at all or only rejected a little by their parents and caregivers because of their sexual orientation or gender identity, highly rejected LGBT young people were:

MORE THAN 8 TIMES AS LIKELY TO HAVE ATTEMPTED SUICIDE

NEARLY 6 TIMES AS LIKELY TO REPORT HIGH LEVELS OF DEPRESSION

MORE THAN 3 TIMES AS LIKELY TO USE ILLEGAL DRUGS

MORE THAN 3 TIMES AS LIKELY TO BE AT HIGH RISK FOR HIV AND SEXUALLY TRANSMITTED DISEASES.

HELPFUL BEHAVIORS

Some of the easiest things you can do are things you are probably already doing:

TELL

your child how much you love them.

SUPPORT

your child's identity.

SHARE

affection with your child in whatever way works best for your family.

LISTEN

to your child with an open mind and open heart.

BUT IT'S ALSO IMPORTANT TO:

ENSURE

that your child is getting the most inclusive healthcare by seeing practitioners who understand diverse sexual orientation.

TALK

to your child about being LGB directly and respectfully. **Do not make assumptions.**

GET

correct information about their sexual orientation.

GET

help for your child when needed – find out who are the right physicians, therapist, social

workers, and community resources for your child.

GIVE

your child books and magazines that explore diverse sexual orientation in a positive way and that are right for their age.

LET

your child participate in age appropriate activities that support their sexual orientation, **BRING THEM** to activities and organizations.

ASK

family members and friends to act respectfully and lovingly toward your child, and **STOP** them from saying anything harmful to your child.

STAND UP

for your child when they are treated badly for being LGB.

TALK

with the leaders of your faith community about supporting your child.

CONNECT

your child with adults who share their identity and who can be a positive role model.

WELCOME

your child's LGBTQ friends into your home.

LET

your child wear their preferred clothing and hairstyles, and do the activities that express who they are.

BELIEVE

that your child can have a happy life as an LGB adult. To a large extent, it is up to you.

CHILDREN'S POSITIVE RESPONSES TO AFFIRMATION

Children who are supported by their families are more likely to:

- Feel good about themselves
- Feel happy about their lives
- Have close relationships with their families
- Stay away from drugs
- Protect themselves from sexually-transmitted diseases such as HIV/AIDS
- Believe that they will have a good life and be happy adults
- Believe that they can someday have meaningful relationships or a family of their own

HURTFUL BEHAVIORS

Sometimes, even with the best of intentions, caregivers' behaviors communicate rejection instead of acceptance. You may recognize some of the behaviors below as something you may have done in the past. Some caregivers have engaged in these behaviors at one time or another. Try to have compassion toward yourself. What is important is to commit to communicating your love and support for your child from this point forward. We can only start from where we are.

- Pressuring your child to conform to traditional gender roles by limiting their choices in toys or activities
- Pressuring your child to appear more feminine or masculine than they would like, for example by making them wear certain clothes, hairstyles, or make-up
- Expressing shame or embarrassment because of who your child is
- Trying to change your child's sexual orientation
- Telling your child to hide or lie about their sexual orientation
- Telling your child that it is their fault that they are being treated badly because of their sexual orientation



- Telling your child that God will punish them for their sexual orientation
- Not allowing your child to participate in family activities and gatherings (weddings, dinners, reunions)
- Not letting your child get information about being LGB or about LGBQ activities, not letting your child communicate with other LGB+ people
- Calling your child names because of their sexual orientation
- Being withdrawn and not affectionate with your child (avoiding hugging and kissing)
- Using physical punishment such as slapping, kicking, or withholding food and water because of your child's LGBQ identity

CHILDREN'S RESPONSES TO HARMFUL BEHAVIORS

LGBQ children who are **NOT SUPPORTED** by their parents or caregivers are more likely to:

- Struggle at school
- Feel isolated, alone, sad and scared
- Not believe that they will have a good life and be a happy adult
- Not believe that they can someday have a meaningful relationships if they want to
- Use drugs
- Have unprotected sex and get a sexually transmitted disease like HIV/AIDS
- Attempt, and even complete, suicide



HERE ARE THE FACTS

NO OUTSIDE INFLUENCES CAUSED YOUR YOUTH'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION.

Sexual orientation is the result of complex genetic, biological, and environmental factors. LGB people come from families of all religious, political, ethnic, and economic backgrounds. Trauma does not make your youth LGB.

LGB YOUTH ARE NOT MORE LIKELY THAN OTHER YOUTH TO BE MENTALLY ILL OR DANGEROUS.

LGB people are not more likely than heterosexual people to molest or otherwise pose a threat to children. And although it is true that people who are LGB experience higher rates of anxiety, depression, and related behaviors (including alcohol and drug abuse) than the general population, studies show that this is a result of the stress of being LGB in an often-hostile environment, rather than a factor of a person's sexual orientation itself.

YOUR YOUTH'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION CANNOT BE CHANGED.

Medical and psychological experts agree that attempting to change someone's sexual orientation does not work and often causes harm.

MANY RELIGIOUS GROUPS EMBRACE LGB PEOPLE.

Some people fear that they will have to choose between their faith and supporting their youth's sexual orientation—but this is not always the case. Many religious communities welcome diverse youth, adults, and their families. It may be important to know that there are other options if your family does not feel welcomed or comfortable at your place of worship.

IT MAY OR MAY NOT BE A LIFE-LONG IDENTITY.

For some children, experimenting and exploring their sexual identity may be a life-long experience. For others it may be a chapter in their lives. Children who may appear to experience sexuality differently, at different points of their lives, may eventually identify as sexually fluid, questioning, or queer—which are all valid identities. You won't know if someone's identity is concrete or fluid until time allows children to fully understand themselves.

WHAT ABOUT...

MY FEELINGS?

Feelings of embarrassment, denial, anger, fear, doubt, grief, and worry are normal, as are feelings of acceptance, understanding, support, pride and joy. Many caregivers feel a combination of positive and negative feelings. This is a hard road for caregivers, and even though we may not have chosen this for our child or ourselves, it is our road to navigate. You are not alone in your feelings or in your experience of raising an LGB child. It can be very helpful and comforting to seek support from other caregivers or from a mental health professional.

OTHER CHILDREN IN THE FAMILY?

Because of society's discomfort with diverse sexual orientation, we may unconsciously bond with our heterosexual children more than our LGB child. By doing this, we may inadvertently place siblings in a position of choosing loyalties to us or to their LGB sibling. Alternately, we may focus on the exceptional needs of an LGB child, overlooking the sibling as a result. One strategy to avoid the division between LGB kids and their siblings is to make sure we discuss sexuality as it relates to all people. This not only avoids treating your LGB child as if they are the "problem," but also helps support siblings in their experiences as well.

EXTENDED FAMILY, FRIENDS, AND THE COMMUNITY?

It can be nerve-wracking and scary for your child or youth to discuss their sexual identity with family and friends. One strategy is to help them call or write a letter to family and friends if having a conversation in person is too scary. You can assist your child by telling family and friends that you are fully supportive of your child. It is important to note that your child's sexual identity is their information and they should have control over with whom they share that information.

RESOURCES

LOCAL

ALLEGHENY COUNTY DEPARTMENT OF HUMAN SERVICES (DHS)

<http://allegHENYcounty.us/Human-Services/Resources/LGBTQ.aspx>

DREAMS OF HOPE

www.dreamsofhope.org/

PARENTS AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS (PFLAG) PITTSBURGH

www.pflagpgh.org (412-833-4556)

PERSAD CENTER

www.persadcenter.org

THE PITTSBURGH EQUALITY CENTER (FORMERLY GLCC)

www.pghequalitycenter.org/

PROJECT SILK

<https://chscorp.org/project-silk>

RESOURCES

NATIONAL

FAMILY ACCEPTANCE PROJECT

<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>

GAY, LESBIAN & STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK (GLSEN)

www.glsen.org/

LGBT NATIONAL HELP CENTER

www.glnh.org/

OUT PROUD FAMILIES

www.outproudfamilies.com/

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