

*The Avenue Community Centre  
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# Gay Parents Straight Kids



# Resources To Check Out

## INTERNET

[www.familieslikemine.com](http://www.familieslikemine.com)

[www.colage.org](http://www.colage.org)  
(Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere)

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)  
(Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)

[www.lesbian.org/lesbian-moms/index.html](http://www.lesbian.org/lesbian-moms/index.html)  
(A Canadian site)

[www.gayparentmag.com](http://www.gayparentmag.com)

[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org) (HRC FamilyNet: Talking about family)  
(HRC National Coming Out Project)

## BOOKS/MAGAZINES

*Gay Fathers* by Robert L Barret & Bryan E. Robinson, © 1990.

*The Lesbian and Gay Parenting Handbook: Creating and Raising Our Families* by April. Marti, © 1993.

*For Lesbian Parents* by Suzanne M. Johnson and Elizabeth O'Connor,  
© 2001.

*Gay and Lesbian Parenting* edited by Deborah F., Glazer & Jack Drescher  
© 2001

*Alternative Family*, bi-monthly magazine available in Saskatoon at Out of the Closet at GLHS or McNally Robinson or Reader's Nook.

into the belief that a parent is only successful if their children turn out straight. This is also fuelled by a fear that the anti-gay groups who would deny gay parents parental rights will use this situation to support their movement. That the children of gay parents are “doomed” to become gay themselves.

For some parents though it is very different. They can make the leap beyond the homophobic expectations of parents and embrace their gay children. Gay children of gay parents, or Second Generation as they are sometimes called, have a unique opportunity to benefit from the life experiences of their gay parent. This inter-generational connection can give a gay child a serious advantage over a gay child with straight parents. Who better to help a gay teen adjust and come to grips with being gay than his/her gay father or lesbian mother?

If a gay parent begins to suspect a child of theirs is gay, it is wise not to ‘panic’. Think back on when you were a teen and struggling with your sexuality. Then, give them the space and support they need to figure this out on their own. If you have been open and honest about your own sexuality with them, it is quite likely that they will be as open and honest with you about theirs. Don’t worry what the homophobes might say or think about you “recruiting” or “turning” your kid gay. Ultimately their going to judge you whatever you say or do, do forget them. Your kids and your relationship with them is far more important right now.

## Conclusion

In human beings the relationship of parent and child is above all the most important of relationships. This relationship is how a child grows and develops into a kind and loving person, a person who can contribute to society in a positive way. A child needs to be loved and cherished. A part of this comes from being honest with your children. Sometimes it is hard for a parent to be honest with their child, out of a fear of doing harm we hold back. Not realizing we are actually inflicting more harm. A child will benefit greatly from having an honest and open relationship with their parents. They will understand their parents better and return themselves.

## Introduction

Of all the relationships we form through life the parent-child relationship is by far the most profound. Children want to be close to their parents, to be a part of their lives and for their parents to be happy. Children can feel hurt and isolated when their parent or parents withdraw; getting wrapped up in their own troubles and issues ~ like coping with being gay or lesbian.

What if you are alone raising your kids how do you explain why you don’t date. Or if you do, why do you go out with the same sex? Or maybe you are a same-sex couple raising kids. How do you cope with teachers, your kids friends and the parents of those friends? What if you’re just coming out and your kids are teens or adults what then? What if you’re married and want/need to end the marriage?

Children are like parents in certain ways when it comes to their parents. Just like a parent has certain expectations of what their child is and will be, so does a child have expectations of what their parents are and will be. Children often idealize their parents, forgetting that their parents are people too, and expect them to behave in set ways. It can be confusing, scary and upsetting to find out that your parents are more than what you had thought.

Children are also amazingly resilient, surprising their parents with remarkable maturity and huge resources of strength and compassion. It is very important not to underestimate the bonds that exist between children and their parents. A child can be as ferocious a defender of his/her parent as a parent is defending its child.

This booklet will cover, in broad terms, a number of points to consider and think about when coming out to your children. Every situation is different. You will need to decide what will work the best for you. If you need help don’t hesitate to contact *The Avenue Community Centre*. You can speak with one of their peer counsellors, get more information, connect with other gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgendered parents and get referrals to family counselling.

## First Off -- Start With Yourself

It is important that you are okay with being or the possibility of being gay. If you have any negativity of being gay, it will have an impact on your kids. Regardless of where you are in the coming out process, if you have a positive attitude about being gay it will help you address your kid's concerns and questions in a positive way.

Society places a great deal of pressure on people to be "straight". This leads to a prejudice and homophobia. It is easy and not at all surprising that many gay men and lesbians want to protect their kids from it. This can make a gay parent overly protective. But it is no less important for you to be honest with your kids as it is for you to be honest with yourself, your parents and friends.

By being comfortable in your own skin being gay it will be easier for your kids to also become comfortable with you being gay. Though it may take them time ~ and don't be shocked if that time is only a few seconds.

## When To Tell The Kids

Don't kid yourself when it comes to your kids' ability to understand 'sexuality' at any age. When you see your Mom and Dad holding hands, kissing or goofing around the house and you're only three you are aware of their love ~ their sexuality. You just don't understand it in adult terms. When you're eight and you walk in on your Mom and Dad having sex you might be scared or confused, but a part of you is aware that this is what mommies and daddies do. Then, when you're sixteen and you wake up in the middle of the night to hear the mattress squeak rhythmically in your parents' room you're shocked, amazed and probably a little creeped out to learn that your parents do have a sex life just like real people. It is the same for the children of gay parents.

Studies around the world have shown that sex can and should be discussed with children at any age. So long as the language and concepts are age appropriate. You would never use the same words for a six year-old as you would for a fifteen year-old. As kids get older more detail can be added as their understanding of relationships between people grows.

## Kids And Adult Problems

It is not uncommon for a marriage to end when a parent comes out of the closet. Divorce, no matter the cause, is always very hard on the kids. It is important that the kids don't become pawns in the arguments, fights and battles of the adults. Emotions can run high. It is crucial that no matter what may be going on between Mom and Dad, that the kids are still very much aware that they are loved. Even if the parents divorced/separated amicably and are supportive friends the children can still have a hard time.

Living in two households can be very stressful on kids. This situation can be made more stressful if one of the households is a gay one. It is extremely important that the parents respect the rules and situation of each other's household when it comes to the kids. The adults need to respect the status of step-parents when it comes to raising the children. Again it boils down to the parents being adults and working hard to keep the emotions they feel towards the child's other parent separate from the emotions that the child feels towards both parents.

There is also the issue of how both parents will deal with the children when they run up against homophobia directed at them and their gay parent. The adults need to be able to give the children the same level and kind of support. An already bad situation can be made worse if the children get mixed messages from their parents on dealing with homophobia, hate and prejudice. Again, the children really need for their parents to be adults.

## Gay Parents -- Gay Kids

Sometimes the theory of genetics being the source of being gay gets strong support when a child of a gay parent also comes out as being gay. This can create a strange set of emotions for the parent. A set of emotions that may be quite surprising.

Gay parents are often surprised to find themselves feeling the same sense of failure as a parent that their own parents initially felt when they heard their child was gay. This is a form of internalized homophobia and is not that uncommon. These parents have bought

Do you hate women? -men? - Mom? - Dad?

Of course not. I just don't have the kind of feelings for them that I do for someone who is the same gender I am. {These kind of questions may also be about the child's concern that their gay parent may not love them because their female or male. Reassure them.}

What do I tell my friends?

Whatever you want; they're your friends. But, think about it first. Some might accept it others may not. You might lose some people you thought you were your friends. We can talk about how might be the best way to do it. If you do decide to tell your friends, let me know how it went, good or bad.

Do you want to be a woman? - a man?

Gay people don't want to be the other gender. Some may dress up like women or men, to do drag, but that's for fun and to entertain. Some might have feminine or masculine traits; but then they usually had the same traits before they came out. However gay people act they are happy being men and women.

There are a few people who come to realize that the person they are inside does not match the person outside. These people are called, "transgender". For many of these people the gay community is a safe place to be. Gay men and lesbians understand what it means to be part of a "sexual minority" and offer transgendered people friendship and support.

What do I call your boyfriend/girlfriend/husband/wife?

Your relationship with my boyfriend/girlfriend is something you will have to work out with them. You can call them by their first name; or you can call them Dad/Papa/Pops or Mom/Mama/Mums, if you want. Whatever the two of you come up with is fine with me.

Also, it is better for the kids to learn about your homosexuality from you and not someone else. And, there are several good reasons for that. Some children will be upset that this 'secret' was hid from them; that their Mom or Dad didn't trust them enough to be honest. It can be very traumatic to hear the subject come up during a fight between parents. Kids are not stupid, they can often sense that something is up, and sometimes this can lead to fear and serious anxiety. It makes it appear that you are ashamed of being gay, that there is something wrong with being gay. This can make your child homophobic, and less secure about their own sexual feelings straight or otherwise. By being open with your kids makes it much more likely that they will be open and honest with you about their own issues and crises. Finally, there is the fact that by you doing it on your own terms you are better prepared to answer their questions, reassure them of your love for them and greatly improve the likelihood of a solid relationship with your children.

## Some Points To Be Aware Of When Telling Your Children

Now, there are no universal rules about how to come out to your children. There are many factors in play: the age of the kids, divorce or custody concerns, homophobic family members, a same-sex partner and a long list of other circumstances. However, there are several guidelines, gathered from numerous sources, to keep in mind as you prepare to come out.

**LOCATION:** A location where you can talk privately and quietly is important. You don't want to have to deal with the waitress interrupting you with offers of coffee. You don't want to do it where you might be overheard, both for your privacy and theirs. A place with few distractions will also help focus the conversation.

**TIME:** Make sure you have enough time to fully talk about the subject and it may require more than just a few hours. In most cases there will be many questions. Sometimes they will need some time to digest what you told them and that may generate more questions. This is often a big deal and it deserves much more time than the five-minute drive home after your weekend together.

**STEREOTYPES:** When you answer their questions be prepared to deal with the stereotypes of gay men and lesbians they and you've grown up with. This is a prime opportunity to deal with these issues. Point out that not all gay men are hairdressers or do drag and not all lesbians drive Harleys or teach phys-ed; though it's a good thing that some do! It is good to also be aware of the source of these stereotypes: kids at school, TV, movies, relatives ~a straight parent.

**REASSURANCES:** When a child finds out their parent is gay, they often and naturally, think of themselves and how this affects them. Will they become gay too? Will you still coach little league? ~help with math? ~go camping? Will you still love them?

Inform them that you came from straight parents and turned out gay. Chances are more likely that they will be straight, but if their not that's okay too. Just because you're gay or lesbian doesn't change what you like to do with your kids. You'll still coach little league, help with their homework and go camping; that hasn't changed. It is extremely important that throughout the whole coming out process with your kids that you always tell them that you love them no matter what happens.

**CONNECTING:** Often kids, especially teenagers, feel alone and isolated, that no one EVER had to face the trials they do. If at all possible try to arrange for your kid's to connect with other children of gay fathers and lesbian mothers. Sometimes it takes another child to understand another. Contact *The Avenue Community Centre* or Parents Family and Friends of Lesbians And Gays

**FOLLOWING UP:** This is not a subject that you will only have to deal with once, especially if your kids are young when you come out. As they grow older they will change, want to know and understand more and probably come up against homophobia from friends and classmates. They may not care at one time and be very concerned another. You may need to be ready to deal with homophobic teachers, coaches and the parents of your kids' friends. Keep the door open to talking about it. Being open to this 'sensitive' subject can also make it easier for them to come to you on their own 'sensitive' issues.

## Likely Questions & Possible Answers

Here are a number of questions that many gay parents run across from their kids when coming out. Some you will get at the time you come out; other will come up later. Be aware that the answers here are general ones and may not use words suitable for any age. Take the time to do some research and soul-searching ahead of time. It will not only make you better prepared but will give you a chance to give ideas that are yours and not someone else's.

*Why are you telling me this?*

You are important to me. Important enough that you should know the truth about me from me. I want you to be as proud of me as I am of you and how can you be if I'm not honest. I don't want you to think that there is something wrong with being gay and the best way to do that is to be out to you.

*What does gay mean?*

Gay people are attracted to and fall in love with people who are the same gender they are, men with men and women with women.

*What made you gay?*

There are many possibilities. No one really knows for sure. The most common reason is because you are born that way. {Be aware that if your kid is asking this, they may be worrying about whether or not they might become gay too.}

*Will I be gay too?*

I don't know. Only you will know. Everyone is different. Remember that my Mom and Dad were straight I came out gay while your uncle(s) / aunt(s) came out straight. I just hope that whoever you fall in love with will make you happy.

*Did your boyfriend/girlfriend make you gay?*

No, he/she didn't. No one can make you straight or gay. They do make me happy.