

Supporting the Families of LGBTIQ+ young people

This resource provides ideas and links to resources and information about how to support the families of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTIQ+) young people.

One of the most crucial protective factors for LGBTIQ+ young people is the support of their families. Well informed and supportive family members are central to the well-being of LGBTIQ+ people, just as they are for non-LGBTIQ+ people. Parental rejection of a child's sexual or gender identity is associated with higher rates of suicide attempts and self-harm. Conversely, supportive relationships with family members not only lowers the rates of self-harm or suicidal behaviours, but can also provide resilience against abuse and discrimination experienced in other contexts.

Some young people will want to share their sexual or gender identity, or intersex status with their family members (see RN guide sheet coming out inviting in) but not all young people want or need to. Don't assume that young people are out to or want to be out to their family members.

Families respond in a range of ways, not all families will need support but it is important to offer opportunities for families to learn about gender and sexual diversity. Workers should make these supports and resources readily available for the family members of all young people, not just those assumed to be LGBTIQ+.

What supports might families need?

What many family members of LGBTIQ+ young people need mirrors the needs of LGBTIQ+ young people; someone to talk to, reassurance, information, and connection to resources and peers.

Some families will have more knowledge and understanding of diverse sex, gender and sexuality than others. Avoid assuming people's knowledge or how they might respond.

Just like for many young people, coming to terms with the sex, gender or sexual identity of a family member can take time. Family members may need to access information and support to be able to process their feelings about their child's gender or sexual identity.

The family members of transgender and gender diverse young people may have different needs and issues to those of same sex attracted young people, these issues may also differ for the families of young people who have intersex variation. There are specific sources of information and support for the families of young people with all of these identities.

Tips for supporting young people and their families

Talk to young people about their families

Asking young people about whether they are out to their families and how supportive their family members are can offer insight into a range of issues for young people including their mental health and risk of homelessness. It can also indicate where a family may benefit from information or support.

Provide a supportive environment for family members

Your service may not formally offer support for families but you can offer links to resources and refer family members to appropriate supports. Talking to you may be the first opportunity they have had to talk about their feelings. It is important to affirm their experience, and then offer resources, information and referral to supports that can help them to understand and affirm their child's sexual or gender identity.

Privacy and Confidentiality

It is important to maintain the privacy and confidentiality of the young people you work with when interacting with their families. You should not disclose information about a young person's gender or sexual identity to a family member unless you have explicit permission from the young person to do so. Unintentionally 'outing' a young person to their family can put the young person at risk.

Providing information and resources

Connect families with resources that can help inform them. Encourage them to do their own research about gender and sexuality, rather than using their LGBTIQ+ family member as their source of information.

Referral

Families of LGBTIQ+ young people may need safe and appropriate spaces to express their feelings about their child's gender or sexual identity. Encourage family members to seek out professional opportunities to do this instead of working through their feelings with their child. They may just want a chat with you or seek ongoing support with a counsellor or peer support group.

Support groups for family members

Just like young LGBTIQ+ people, their family members can benefit from meeting peers and sharing their experience. If there isn't a support group for families, you could consider supporting the establishment of a group in your region.

"You can speak to numerous workers but there is no comparison to the deep connection you feel when you speak to another parent who has successfully walked the path before you." – Kerry

Pathways to support

Share links and resources for families on your website, develop pathways to information and support for families in your region, share this information widely.

Family rejection

Young people whose families are not supportive will likely have the greatest need for other forms of support. If a young person's home environment is not affirming of their sex, gender, or sexuality then having access to an affirming space such as an LGBTIQ+ peer group can be vital to their health & wellbeing. You do not need permission from family for young people to participate in social and support groups.

Abusive behaviour

Where family members are abusive to the young person including because of their gender or sexual identity you may need to consider the safety of the young person, the risk of homelessness and possible need for housing support.

Abusive behaviour perpetrated by a family member because of a young person's sex, gender or sexuality is a form of family violence. This can take the form of controlling behaviour around gender & sexuality expression, threats, financial control, verbal abuse such as homo/bi/transphobic language and or physical abuse.

If you feel a young person's physical, emotional, or psychological safety may be at risk due to the behaviour of their family you should contact a family violence service for further advice.

Resources

Families like Mine

A guide for parents and families of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender diverse or who are questioning their gender or sexuality. Lots of information and video content of families talking about their experience of having a family member who is LGBT.

familieslikemine.beyondblue.org.au/#folio=1

Making Sense Booklet

This PFLAG booklet uses somewhat dated language in parts but is still very useful for the detailed answers it provides to many of the common questions that families may have and the stories of family members.

pflagvictoria.org.au/making%20sense-%20pflag.pdf

Families- A Qlife Guide for Health Professionals

qlife.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/5-Families-for-web.pdf

Queerspace

Queerspace provides a safe and supportive space to obtain information and support services aimed at improving mental health and wellbeing by specialist queer and queer affirmative mental health practitioners

ds.org.au/our-services/queerspace

Parents of Gender Diverse Children

Provide peer support to parents and those parenting trans and gender diverse children, including information, referrals, and peer support. PGDC also provide advice to professionals, services and interested groups about gender diversity, and inclusive practice.

pgdc.org.au

TransFamily

Peer Support Group for parents, siblings, extended family and /or friends of a trans person. A Melbourne-based group that meet in Carlton on the 4th Saturday of each month.

transfamilysite.wordpress.com

Intersex Human Rights Australia

Information and resources about bodily diversity and intersex variation for parents and prospective parents.

ihra.org.au/parents

w/ respect

LGBTIQ specialist family violence support. Individual and family counselling, recovery support.

withrespect.org.au

Qlife

QLife provides anonymous and free LGBTI peer support and referral for people wanting to talk about sexuality, identity, gender, bodies, feelings or relationships, this includes young people, family members or people working with young people and/or their families.

Phone 1800 184 527 or Webchat
3PM to MIDNIGHT, EVERY DAY

*we use the word families throughout this resource as an overarching term that encompasses a broad definition of the term family and includes those living with immediate family such as parents as well as extended family members, guardians, foster carers, adoptive families and chosen families.

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