



# Keeping families together



**Keeping families together**

is a handbook for families and friends produced by PFLAG.

To order more copies of this booklet, please contact your local PFLAG, or the organisation below.





# PFLAG

We are the parents and friends of lesbian & gay people. We hold monthly support meetings, have an information telephone line, and provide resources to educate parents and others on issues of homosexuality.

There are PFLAG groups all over the world, providing comfort and reassurance to help families stay together.



**PFLAG parents**

This booklet has been produced by PFLAG Western Sydney Inc., PFLAG NSW and Twenty 10 Youth Support Service. We are very grateful for the assistance provided by Twenty 10.

As President of PFLAG Western Sydney, I have long felt the need for a booklet for parents. After thinking about the project for some time, I presented a proposal to the Management Committee, who were very enthusiastic. A small sub-committee was formed consisting of Pamela Garske and myself from PFLAG Western Sydney and Jeff Edgell from PFLAG NSW.

We believe it is crucial for families to have accurate, unbiased information. PFLAG receives many calls from parents whose son or daughter has 'come out' to them. They are frequently in a state of crisis. They feel their hopes and dreams are shattered and they are often fearful for their child. Who can they talk to? Who can they trust?

After they have spoken to a parent, they need more information in the form of reading matter that will help them understand that homosexuality is not a

choice and that their child needs their support and love— more than ever.

This booklet will help address that need.

It will help families realise that having a homosexual child is not the end of the world. They will discover they are not alone and there are many other parents and families with a son or daughter who happens to be homosexual.

Many parents say the experience of having a gay or lesbian child has enriched their lives and they find they have grown as people, becoming much more accepting of differences in other people.

At PFLAG our goal is to keep families together. We believe this booklet will help to achieve that aim.



**Mollie Smith, President  
PFLAG Western Sydney Inc.**

# THANKYOU

**for taking the time to read this booklet. This is your first step towards the acceptance of your loved one's sexuality.**

It may be difficult for you to come to terms with the news you have been entrusted with, but we hope by reading this booklet some of your questions will be answered and you will realise you are not alone.

The decision for somebody to reveal his or her homosexuality is not taken lightly. The individual has generally given this step a great deal of thought and approaches it with great maturity and a sense of fear. The process of telling somebody that you are homosexual is filled with the danger of rejection. How you react to this news is going to determine how much suffering your loved one will endure.

Right now you probably feel confused and may be wondering where you went wrong. Blaming yourself for everything and wishing you could return to the status quo. It's not your fault, nor anybody's fault. Be reassured that a combination of mixed feelings including grief, anger and despair are quite common. Maybe you also have a feeling of relief that everything is out in the open and you can now have a more open relationship with your loved one.

Remember, your loved one is the same



person you have always known, with the same good habits and the same bad habits – only now you know they are homosexual.

Sexual orientation is only one part of a person's life. Take time to talk to them, listen to them and invite their friends home.

Above all, keep loving them. They did not choose to be homosexual any more than you chose to be heterosexual.

The journey to understanding homosexuality will be full of ups and downs, but with love and compassion it will be one of the most fulfilling journeys a person can take.

There are many other people who have been through the same experience and who are very willing to help you. Detailed information is available at the back of this booklet. However, a good place to start is by contacting your local PFLAG support group.

**Thank you again for taking the time to read this booklet.**

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## ■ HETEROSEXUAL

People whose sexual desire and feelings of love are primarily for the opposite gender

## ■ HOMOSEXUAL

People whose sexual desire and feelings of love are primarily for the same gender

## ■ GAY

People whose sexual desire and feelings of love are primarily for the same gender. In Australia this can mean men or women, though the term tends to be used mainly for men

## ■ LESBIAN

Women whose sexual desire and feelings of love are primarily for women

## ■ BISEXUAL

People whose sexual desire and feelings of love are for both men and women

## ■ TRANSGENDER

People who do not identify with the sex or gender they were born with ie. Not being born into the right physical body

## ■ GLBT

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender

## ■ HETEROSEXISM

The assumption that everybody is heterosexual and that heterosexual relationships are superior to same sex relationships

## ■ HOMOPHOBIA

The irrational fear and hatred of those who love and sexually desire those of the same sex. Homophobia includes prejudice, discrimination, harassment and acts of violence brought on by fear and hatred. Discrimination, harassment and violence are against the law

## ■ STDs

Sexually transmitted diseases eg HIV/AIDS, herpes, chlamydia etc

## ■ COMING OUT

The process of identifying as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. This has various stages. At first, it is to do with the realisation of one's own attraction to members of the same sex, then being more open about this with people who are trusted. It may lead to being open with other people, eg. work colleagues, neighbours, etc. It also refers to the process parents go through when telling others about their child's sexuality.



**How many gay, lesbian & bisexual people are there?**

Research tells us that approximately 10% of the population are gay, lesbian or bisexual.<sup>1</sup> That means that on average, someone in every extended family is either gay, lesbian or bisexual. Love and sexual relations between people of the same gender have been found in every known culture and society. These relationships are in every social, economic, racial and religious group. Gay, lesbian and bisexual people work in all professions. They are our friends, our families and our colleagues. We all personally know gay, lesbian or bisexual people, but we may not be aware of it.

**What causes someone to be heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual or transgender?**

Research so far has highlighted only one thing – we do NOT know what causes anyone’s sexual orientation. Gay, lesbian and bisexual people have been raised in all kinds of homes, as have heterosexual people. One thing is clear: this is a complex, multifaceted issue.

**Is homosexuality natural?**

Being gay, lesbian or bisexual is as natural and healthy as being heterosexual. For the 10% (approximately) of Australians who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, it is a natural part of who they are, and for them to be heterosexual would be unnatural.

Prior to the 1950’s, homosexuality was treated by psychiatrists as a disorder. Times have changed and today homosexuality is accepted as a legitimate and psychologically healthy expression of human sexuality.

Over the years, discussions between Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) have revealed that:

- People are often aware of their sexual orientation at a very early age, heterosexual or homosexual.
- No children were influenced or taught to be gay, lesbian or bisexual by any other person.

1. Bell, A and Weinberg, M (1978) *Homosexualities: A Study of Diversity Among Men and Women*. New York, Simon and Schuster

- Family fears of “catching” homosexuality or being “recruited” are without scientific foundation. These fears are irrational (see Homophobia) and in families where homosexual children try to deny their sexuality, the ramifications can be enormous.

**Can you identify gay, lesbian and bisexual people by the way they behave and dress?**

Australia is a richly diverse society, in which people behave and dress in all kinds of ways. Ignorance and prejudice give rise to assumptions and stereotypes. A stereotype never fits everyone in any group. Physical appearance and mannerisms have nothing to do with a person’s sexuality. These are part of their personality.

**Do gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have more sexual partners?**

Gay, lesbian and bisexual people share the same amount of interest in sexual activity as heterosexual people. As with heterosexual people gay, lesbians and bisexuals are individuals. They have a diverse range of lifestyles, relationships and interests in sexual activity. Many gay, lesbian and bisexual couples hold commitment ceremonies to celebrate their relationships formally, in the company of friends and family.

**Do gay men abuse children?**

Paedophilia and other forms of child abuse occur mainly in the home environment by a family member. 95% of child abuse is carried out by heterosexual-identifying people.<sup>2</sup>

**Why did they have to tell me?**

It is important to accept and understand your child’s sexuality. Some families believe they may have been happier not knowing. They start to recall the time before they knew as “problem free”, remembering an ideal rather than the reality.

2. Jenny, C, Roester, T, Poyer, K (1994) *Are Children At Risk for Sexual Abuse by Homosexuals?* Pediatrics Vol 94(1)

Sometimes we can try to deny what is happening by rejecting what we're hearing ("It's just a phase, you'll get over it"), or by not registering the impact of what we're being told ("That's nice, dear, and what do you want for dinner?")

Parents and families may feel resentment towards their child's or loved one's sexuality. This feeling is based on the belief that to be gay, lesbian or bisexual was a conscious decision. It also comes from the parent's fears – fears of pain/discomfort associated with their 'coming out' about their child's sexuality and the resulting homophobia that they too may experience.

It is important to know the main decision most gays, lesbians and bisexuals have to make is "Will I be honest about who I am, or will I hide it?". Hiding it imposes a constant and tremendous burden. A large part of their life would be kept secret from you and you would never really know the whole person.

Someone who has reached the point of telling a parent or someone close to them they are gay, lesbian or bisexual is not usually a person who is going through a phase. Generally they have thought long and hard to understand and acknowledge their sexual orientation.

For someone to tell their family or friend they are gay, lesbian or bisexual often means taking a great risk – the biggest risk is that of rejection. Few people would take that risk lightly or prematurely.

**Why didn't they tell us before?**

Your child or loved one has probably been thinking this through for months, even years. This does not mean a lack of trust, lack of love or a reflection on your relationship. If you are a parent it can be painful to realise you don't know your child as well as you thought you did and that you have been excluded from a part of their life. To some extent, this is true in all parenting relationships, regardless of sexuality.

Gay, lesbian and bisexual people often recognise at an early age that they feel "different", but it may take years before they can put a name to it. It is often not until this stage that they consider telling someone.

Even though you may have some sadness for not having been able to help your child or loved one through that period, or you feel that the outcome may have been different if you'd known earlier, it is important to understand your child or loved one probably could not have told you any sooner. Even more importantly, discussing the situation now is an invitation to a more open and honest relationship.

Because homophobia still exists in our society, it takes time for gays, lesbians and bisexuals to acknowledge their own sexuality. It is not uncommon for gay people to internalise self-hate or insecurity about their sexual identity. For many reasons it may take time for someone to think through and work up the courage to tell a parent. Even if you feel your child should have known they could tell you anything, remember that our culture's treatment of homosexuality says "don't ask, don't tell".

**What did we do wrong?**

Parents and family members can sometimes experience feelings of guilt when they first learn of their child's or loved one's attractions for the same gender.

Some parents react with shock, denial and anger to the news their child is gay, lesbian or bisexual. One response is to wonder, "How could she do this to me?". This is not a rational reaction - but it is a human response to pain.

We liken this reaction to a grieving process: here you are grieving over losing an image of your child.

Some parents feel that they did something "wrong". However, there is no evidence that different parenting styles or family situations have a bearing on sexual orientation. What families can provide is an environment of unconditional acceptance.

As you work through your feelings, you can take courage from the fact that the one thing your child has 'done' to you is to trust that your relationship will grow as a result of your knowing the truth. What families can provide is an environment in which a young person can understand themselves and strive to reach their full potential.

**Why am I uncomfortable with my child's or loved one's sexuality?**

Our culture and society provides us with messages about a number of issues, including sexuality.

The negative messages and myths we have learned from our society about sexuality are very strong and not easy to dismiss. However, developing a better understanding of your child or loved one, and becoming more familiar with the issues, will help reduce these uncomfortable feelings.

Many parents may confront another source of guilt. Parents who see themselves as "open-minded", believing they have put sexual prejudice behind them (even those who have gay friends), are sometimes stunned to realise they are uncomfortable when they learn it is their child who is gay, lesbian or bisexual. These parents not only have to grapple with suppressed, deep-rooted personal fears of homosexuality but also have the added burden of dealing with their conscious self image of being "open-minded".

It helps to concentrate on real concerns - what your child needs most from you now. Try not to focus on the guilt. It is baseless and it accomplishes nothing for anyone. Neither you nor your child had or will have any control over the arrival and determination of your child's sexuality.

**Could a counsellor or therapist be helpful?**

Support can be gained from a counsellor or therapist experienced with family issues and sexual orientation. You may want to talk to someone about your own feelings and how to work through them. You can feel that you and your child need help communicating clearly through this period. Or, you may recognise that your child is unhappy and needs help with self acceptance.

Try to find someone who you and/or your child can feel safe with and can talk openly with. Respect and trust are fundamentals in any relationship with a helping professional. Like finding a good doctor - sometimes finding a good therapist or counsellor can take time. So don't give up if the first one you find is not to your liking.

Consulting a counsellor or therapist in the hope of changing your child's or loved one's sexual orientation has little value. Homosexuality is not a disease or illness and so is not something to be 'cured'.

We encourage you to explore your options and to use those best suited to you and your family. Please refer to the resource section in the back of the booklet for suggestions.

**Will they be rejected, have trouble finding or keeping a job, or be physically attacked?**

Our society often discriminates and can even be violent towards people who are seen to be different.

Homophobia is still a strong part of our culture. As long as homophobia exists, gay, lesbian or bisexual people and their families have some very legitimate fears and concerns.

However, attitudes toward different sexualities have been slowly changing for the better and are more positive in many places. There are a growing number of groups who are working for such a change and who are ready to help those who have difficulties.

It is important to remember that many gays, lesbians and bisexuals have grown to fulfil their dreams and have become very successful and respected people in the community. As a society we may have a long way to go, but giving your child support and love will go far to making his or her life journey easier.



## Should we tell family, neighbours, friends?

Just as “coming out” is difficult for gay, lesbian and bisexual people, the coming-out process is equally difficult for parents. Many, upon learning their child is gay, lesbian or bisexual, go right into the closet. As they struggle with accepting their child’s sexual orientation, they often worry about other people finding out. There is the challenge of fielding such questions as, “Has he got a girlfriend?”, and “So when is she going to get married?”

You may get some negative or, at the least insensitive comments from relatives, friends or co-workers. But you’ll probably find that those comments are fewer than you now fear.

One parent said,

“I used to go in the bathroom and close the door and practise saying to the mirror, ‘I have a lesbian daughter’ and saying it with pride. And it helped, but you really do have to practise”.

Talk to people who understand your concerns. Remember your child or loved one has been down this road already. They may even be able to help. PFLAG members may be helpful to you in discussing their own experiences too.

And remember, who you tell about your child’s sexuality should be a decision both of you discuss and reach together, as a matter of respect. After all, it’s their life you’re discussing.

## What will the neighbours say?

This could be a very real concern, especially for families who consider themselves part of a close community

One parent said:

“I thought I was the only mother in our community who had a gay son. And when I started speaking out on the issue, other parents started coming forward. And now every time someone says to me ‘I need to talk to you’, I know exactly what’s coming up”.

For some parents religion may be the most difficult issue to face. For others, it’s a non-issue. Most religions and churches have members with a range of views and interpretations of their faith. A number of religious organisations support equal rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual people, others do not.

For those whose faith is in the Bible, you will still hear people quote the Bible in defence of their prejudice against gay people. But many Biblical scholars dispute any anti-gay interpretations of Biblical texts. If this is an important issue to you or your family, PFLAG may be able to assist.



**No virus is smart enough to be able to tell what a person's sexuality is. All people and communities face the threat of AIDS.**

AIDS is not a gay men's disease.

It is the activities a person practices that place him or her at risk of HIV infection. Everyone should make sure they understand how sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV are transmitted and how to protect both themselves and other people. The best cure is prevention. Be informed. Like education on drugs, educate and inform yourself and your child/loved one about safe sex, HIV and other STDs.

HIV is transmitted through blood, semen and breast milk. It can be transmitted through unprotected sex, sharing needles or from mother to child during birth or through breast feeding.

Practising safe sex and not sharing needles or equipment is the best protection from HI, and other sexually transmitted diseases and blood borne viruses.

If your child or loved one has HIV or AIDS, they need your support more than ever. You should know that you are not alone. There are numerous local and national organisations that can help you with medical, psychological and physical care. There are excellent resources with more information available about STDs and HIV from the following organisations:

**AIDS Council of New South Wales (ACON)**

T. 1800 063 060 (Freecall outside Sydney), or

T. 02 9206 2000

**Albion Street Centre Hotline**

T. 1800 451 600

Also contact Community Health Centres or Sexual Health Clinics in your local area.

**You can support your child or loved one by educating yourself as much as possible about sexuality. Every child needs different things from their family.**

Young people realise that gays, lesbians and bisexuals are condemned by society. Even before they reach the kindergarten playground, they learn negative words for gays, lesbians and bisexuals. Young people generally assume all the people they know are heterosexual. They have no idea some of the respected adults around them are gay, lesbian or bisexual.

Many gay, lesbian and bisexual young people feel profoundly isolated: "Surely I am the only person like this." Some are viciously harassed and abused by peers, family members, school community and others.

Whether or not they are labelled by others, these young people often:

- fear being discovered and expect rejection;
- carefully guard their feelings to maintain acceptance (or merely to survive);
- have no opportunity openly to date each other, flirt or engage in sexual experimenting like other teens;
- lack accurate information about their feelings and experiences.



**A young person's sexual identity does not itself cause them to feel depressed or suicidal. It is the experience of growing up "different" in a society that often does not support difference and is homophobic that can be devastating.**

In fact, research has indicated that young gay, lesbian and bisexual people are up to 7 times more likely to attempt suicide.<sup>3</sup>

Isolation contributes to the depression and sense of hopelessness. It can be physical and/or emotional. We know from research that physical isolation plays a big role in the youth suicide rate in Australian rural communities.

We also know that lack of family and/or community support, or non-awareness of support services contributes to the emotional isolation experienced by gay, lesbian and bisexual young people.

Education about gay, lesbian and bisexual people is an important step in being able to support young people and prevent further suicide attempts. Avenues need to be created to help young people develop positive self-esteem and skills to deal with a sometimes hostile environment.

These young people need:

- supportive opportunities to socialise with one another;
- resources that specifically address their concerns,
- sensitive, non-judgmental help as they come to understand themselves.



**3.** Remafedi G, Farrow J and Dister R (1991) "Risk Factors for Attempted Suicide in Gay and Bisexual Youth" *Pediatrics* 87 (6) 869-876.

## How to help your child or loved one if they are feeling depressed or suicidal

If you feel that your child, loved one or anyone you know may be feeling suicidal, here are some suggestions that may help:

- The best way to help someone who is feeling suicidal is to get them to contact one of the crisis lines listed at the back of this book, or call them yourself for some advice. Crisis lines have trained counsellors who can talk to people about their feelings.
- Don't be afraid to ask someone who is feeling depressed and lost if they have had thoughts of hurting themselves. Ask in a non-judgmental way, and be prepared for the answer.
- Listen openly and calmly. Don't be afraid to talk about suicide or the problems that have caused the suicidal behaviour. Problems don't get worse by talking about them.
- Show you care. If they confide in you that they have been thinking about suicide, tell them and show them how much you care.
- Don't agree to keep their suicidal thoughts a secret. Get a professional to do a suicide risk assessment and don't leave the person alone.
- Take notice of threats. Try not to change the subject because you're scared– this may look like you don't care.
- Don't try to solve their problems as soon as they share them. To a person thinking about suicide, the problems look major and unsolvable right now. They may just want to share them with someone at this stage. Acknowledge the difficulties and offer unconditional support to help them to choose to live and to continue to work on their problems – together as a team.
- Don't tell them they're selfish to consider suicide when their life is so good, or that suicide is the easy way out. This will make them feel guilty as well as depressed.

# HOW DO PARENTS FEEL?

A psychiatrist spoke to PFLAG about how many parents feel:

“Once most people adjust to the reality of their child’s sexual orientation, they feel like they’ve had a whole new world opened to them. First, they become acquainted with a side of their child they never knew. They now are included in their child’s life. Usually, they get closer. And the parents begin to meet the gay community and understand that these people are just like any other community.”

Some parents share their feelings:

“I’d say that reading and learning more about sexual orientation is what helped me most...laying to rest some of the myths I had heard...So the more I learned, the angrier I got, and the more I wanted to change society instead of my son.”

“I think the turning point for me was when I read more about it, and read that most kids who can accept their sexuality say they feel calmer, happier and more confident. And, of course, that’s what I wanted for my child and I sure didn’t want to be what was standing in the way of that.

“It’s really important to talk about it, to know you’re not alone and that there are other people who have had this experience and are dealing with it in a positive way. And the benefit is that you establish a good relationship with your child. Parents want to parent. They don’t want to be isolated from their kid.”

“I have to tell you, there are so many pluses now. You begin to recognise what an incredible child you have to share this with you, and to want you to be part of their life. The trust that’s been placed in your hands, and the guts it took to do that, is amazing.”

# HOW DO PARENTS FEEL?

Some commonly held assumptions:

**Myth: Gays, lesbians and bisexuals do not have long term relationships**

**Fact:** Gay, lesbian and bisexual relationships do work. Long term partnerships are not rare at all. Many same sex couples may not access gay venues or frequent ‘the scene’ and therefore are not as visible to the community.

**Myth: Gay, lesbian and bisexual people grow up to be lonely old people.**

**Fact:** Gays, lesbians and bisexuals develop long-lasting friendships and relationships that they consider part of their family. Many have children.

**Myth: Gay men are more likely to sexually abuse children**

**Fact:** The vast majority of child sexual abuse occurs heterosexually and is usually associated with the home environment.

**Myth: Homosexuality is contagious**

**Fact:** People cannot “catch” a sexuality. People cannot be “recruited” to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or heterosexual.

**Myth: Bisexuals just can’t make up their minds**

**Fact:** The point is they have! Sexuality is a range between exclusively homosexual and exclusively heterosexual. Many people are naturally between the extremes of the spectrum.

**Myth: All gay men have anal sex**

**Fact:** Gay men are diverse and have preferences like anyone else. Some practise anal sex, some do not. Some heterosexuals also practise anal sex.

**Myth: Gay men want to be women and lesbians want to be men**

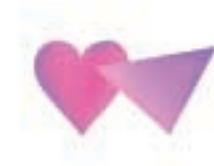
**Fact:** This is confusing sexuality with issues concerning gender. Gay men and lesbians, like all people, are diverse. For more information, see the back of this booklet.

**Each state of Australia has its own laws and statutes. However, there has been substantial progress in achieving equal rights for gay, lesbian and bisexual people. Since 1982 discrimination on the grounds of homosexuality is outlawed in New South Wales. And in 1999 same sex de facto couples were granted legal recognition in most areas of NSW law.**

It is against the law to discriminate against a gay, lesbian or transgender person in the areas of employment, public education, accommodation, the provision of goods and services, or by a registered club. It is also unlawful to vilify someone on the grounds of their homosexuality.

Vilification is any public act that is likely to incite (stir up) hatred, serious contempt or severe ridicule toward a group of people because of their homosexuality.

For further information on these issues, please contact the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW, or the Gay and Lesbian Rights Lobby.<sup>4</sup>



<sup>4</sup> The information in this section has been sourced from the booklet ‘Acts of Passion’ produced by the NSW Attorney General’s Department in November 2000.

**I am the mother of two children, a gay son and a straight daughter. I consider I raised both my children using the same guidelines but having regard to their different personalities.**

Our son was very easygoing, very friendly, played easily with other children and loved school in the early years. He was a very bright student, attended cubs, then scouts and a drama group. His acting was outstanding.

Parents have hopes for their children. My hope for my son was to combine his intellect and his acting ability and to me that made him a barrister. I always told both my children to always do their best. Life was pretty good until my son was in Year 5. The other students decided he was “different”. At the end of Year 5 he was elected school captain for Year 6. The teachers were thrilled as were my husband and myself. The kids at school booed him. We wondered why.

He was not popular because he was not sporty and did not enjoy contact sports at all. He had been a gymnast for a number of years and he loved doing that. It was at this time I started wondering about him being different. How? What was different? My son thought that by joining the baseball team he would be accepted. He was not a great player and the other boys quickly decided they did not want him on the team. He stayed until the completion of the season, but it was not a happy time at all.

Boys started calling him “Gaylord”, which hurt. I tried to explain that they did not know what they were saying but they certainly knew it was derogatory and that it hurt. Was I to blame for



all this because I was an elder mother (for those days)? Was I dressing him differently? What was I doing wrong? Was it the little rag doll he had as a baby? I kept all those concerns to myself.

High school was a nightmare. He was bullied to and from school and verbally and physically harassed at school. On one occasion he went missing. The school phoned and I spent the latter half of the day walking his route to school looking in bushes and calling his name. He eventually arrived home. He had spent the day with a sympathetic friend. He said he just couldn't face another day of harassment at school. Every single day at high school dealt him further blows. His self-esteem was almost non-existent and he never smiled. Our home life was suffering as well.

After our son was hit in the head with a chair, we moved him to another school. I soon came to realise that the problem was my son himself. The boys hated him, the girls loved him.

It was at this time that I wondered if he was gay. What will I do if he is, I asked myself. I kept all these thoughts to myself. Another year passed and I was almost at my wit's end. He was moody, withdrawn, dark and his paintings and drawings depicted death in some form. I felt sure he would commit suicide. I took him to an adolescent paediatrician who suggested he might be gay but was still sorting himself out. I felt I would rather have a gay son than a dead son, so I felt a little relieved.

He survived another year at high school. He left at the end of Year 10 and did a Fine Arts Course at TAFE and then went into hairdressing. My dream of a barrister was shattered. The harassment did not stop. He was attacked on public transport, sitting at the bus stop. We had graffiti painted on our property.

Finally he left home to live in Surry Hills. I found it hard to accept that he would rather live in a terrible place, half-starving most of the time, than be at home with his family. He had had enough.

He eventually came out. While it wasn't news to me, it was to my husband, who was wonderful. Eventually we all came out and what a liberating experience that turned out to be. The coming out experience for us was a very hard thing to do. It made us realise how hard it is for the gay person themselves. Parents are the ones they do not want to disappoint. They need to know that their parents are supportive and will still love and care for them.

I would not change my son for anything. He did not choose to be gay and it is not easy to be gay. Homosexuals only want to be accepted as human beings. Their sexuality is such a small part of the whole person – as it is for heterosexuals.



## ...An open letter to my daughter on her birthday...

Just twenty-three years ago, I recall holding you in my arms for the first time. I remember the turmoil inside as you turned my ordered world on its end. Little did I know this was just the beginning as you captured the part of my heart reserved for a first child.

It was at that point that I discovered there is no more fervent a feminist than the father of a baby girl! No daughter of mine was going to be forced into any stereotypical role imposed by society. I didn't know how true this was going to be.

The early years were easy. Nothing more traumatic than scraped knees and fights with your sister and plenty of hugs. Then came the teenage years when you battled against confines and restrictions as you searched for the real you. Feminine pink turned to black as you tried to express yourself. I couldn't hug you then, you wouldn't allow it.

Then crisis, as you realised you couldn't fit the design I had created for you. I recall the hurt and pain as we all dismantled the flimsy structures we had created as our ideal of a family and rebuilt it piece by piece. But we've come out the other side and I realise you are still the same little girl I held two decades ago. As I see you take charge of your life and steer the path that only you can find I am indeed very, very proud to call you my daughter.

Be true to yourself only.....

- **PFLAG**  
(Parents & Friends of Lesbians & Gays)  
Ph. 9294 1002  
[www.pflagaustralia.org](http://www.pflagaustralia.org)
- **Twenty 10**  
**Gay & Lesbian Youth Support**  
Ph. 1800 65 2010  
Ph. 8585 6300  
[www.twenty10.org.au](http://www.twenty10.org.au)
- **AIDS Council of NSW (ACON)**  
Ph. 1800 063 060/ 02 9206 2000  
[www.acon.org.au](http://www.acon.org.au)
- **Gay & Lesbian**  
**Counselling Service**  
(7 days, 4pm-midnight)  
Ph. 1800 805 379  
Ph. 9207 2800  
[www.glcsnsw.org.au](http://www.glcsnsw.org.au)
- **Anti-Violence Project**  
(Homophobic/Hate-related Violence)  
Ph. 1800 063 060  
Ph. 9206 2066  
[www.stophomophobia.org](http://www.stophomophobia.org)
- **The Gender Centre**  
Ph. 9569 2366
- **Kids Help Line** (24 hours)  
1800 551 800  
[www.kidshelp.com.au](http://www.kidshelp.com.au)
- **Lifeline**  
Ph. 131 114

- **Police Gay & Lesbian**  
**Liaison Officers**  
Ph. 9281 0000  
[www.eagles.com.au/~gllos](http://www.eagles.com.au/~gllos)
- **Gay & Lesbian Rights Lobby**  
Ph. 9360 6650  
[www.glrll.org.au](http://www.glrll.org.au)
- **Acts of Passion**  
[www.actsofpassion.nsw.gov.au](http://www.actsofpassion.nsw.gov.au)
- **Legal Information**  
[www.lawstuff.org.au](http://www.lawstuff.org.au)

Title	Author/Publisher
<b>My Child Is Gay</b>	Bryce McDougall (Allen & Unwin '98)
<b>Beyond Acceptance</b>	GW Griffin, M&A Wirth (Prentice Hall 1986)
<b>Invisible Families</b>	Terry Stewart (Tandem Press 1955)
<b>Coming Out to Parents</b>	Mary V Borhek (Pilgrim Press 1993)
<b>Inside Out</b>	editor Erin Shales (Bookman Press '99)
<b>Coming Out, Coming Home</b>	Joan Golding & Peter Wood MSC (Spectrum Press)
<b>Acts of Passion</b>	NSW Attorney General's Dept. Ph. 9228 7494
<b>An Intergalactic Guide To Relationships</b>	Central Coast Health Ph. 4320 2578

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