

QUESTIONS YOU NEED TO CONSIDER BEFORE COMING OUT TO YOUR PARENTS

From Gayline Wellington <http://www.gayline.gen.nz>

Are you sure you are gay?

Don't try to talk about it with your parents unless you are sure. If you're not sure, your parents will be confused and probably think you don't know what you are talking about.

Are you at ease with being gay?

If you're feeling guilty and unhappy from time to time, it's better not to tell your parents right away. You may need a lot of energy when you tell them. You will also need a lot of strength, which comes from being comfortable with your gayness.

Do you have friends who know you well, who you trust, and who will help you through a hard time?

If your parents react badly, you will need someone you can rely on, to help you. It may be a friend, a counsellor or a group of others who are coming out. It is very important to mix with others you can talk with. You need their help so that if things are difficult, you don't get too unhappy.

Do you know quite a lot about being gay?

Your parents may know very little about being gay. It's not something most parents talk or think about. If you've done some serious reading about it, you'll be able to help them with the real facts. Joining a group of others who are thinking about coming out is another way to learn facts about why some guys and some women are gay. You can learn about famous people who have been gay too. The more you know, the better.

What's life like at home?

Think about the best time to tell your parents and family. Pick a time when they are feeling relaxed. If you can, put off telling them during a major family crisis, such as if one of them has a major illness, or lost a job.

Can you give your parents time to get used to your being gay?

Your parents will need time to get used to your being gay, especially if finding out been a real shock to them. It may even take a number of years for your parents to be relaxed about you being gay. They have emotions too.

Why are you coming out to your parents now?

The best reason is because now you love them and feel unhappy, pretending to be straight all the time. Never lose control and blurt out that you are gay in the middle of an argument or when you're angry.

Are you prepared, with books, and/or people that can help you explain about being gay to your parents?

Most non-gay people don't know much about being gay. Try to have ready at least one of the following, to help explain things to your parents:

1. A book for parents, by another parent with gay children
Try "**Invisible Families**" by Terry Stewart. *Tandem Press NZ*
Or "**My Child is Gay**" by Ed Bryce. *McDougall Allen & Unwin (Australia)* -has NZ and Aust. Parents stories
2. Contacts for the **PFLAG** group, for Parents Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays.
3. The name of a non gay counsellor.
4. Having other people your parents can speak to, or books they can read, will help them to understand

Do you live at home and rely on your parents for food and spending money?

If you think they might throw you out of the house or stop paying college fees, you should think about waiting to come out, until you have a job and can keep yourself with your wages.

How well do you get on with your parents?

If you've always got along well, and know they love you, and if they know you love them, the chances are that they will be able to deal with finding out that you're gay, more easily.

Do they think about things as good or bad or as holy or sinful?

If they do, they are likely to find it hard to accept you as gay. On the other hand, if you know that they think about things, and can change their ideas when they have got the facts and thought things through, then it's likely they will in the end, come to understand.

Is it your idea to come out to your parents?

Some gay people never come out to their parents. Don't let others push you into telling your parents. You need to make up your own mind. Only come out if you're sure you'll be better off, however your parents react.

PFLAG South

Parents, Family and Friends of Lesbians and Gays

Mail PO Box 5266 Dunedin New Zealand
Phone 027 6869 304
Email enquiries@pflag.org.nz
Website www.pflag.org.nz

Youth Support

Same Difference support and social activities group
Contact 027 496 8847 or 027 4 YOUTHS
Email enquiries@pflag.org.nz

TELLING YOUR PARENTS YOU'RE GAY

-A Parent's Perspective

This information is for anyone who is gay, or lesbian or bisexual and possibly some who are not sure what is happening to them. It may also be of interest to counsellors, teachers and anyone who wants information about coming out to parents.

This is written from a parent's perspective by Terry Stewart, author of **'Invisible Families'** who has, herself, a gay son.

Parents should love their children unconditionally and many parents do so. However, what if you fear, that your parents may 'freak out' at the news you are gay?

The first thing you need is to have good information yourself, and be secure about who you are. Have at least one caring support person to turn to if your parents react badly to your 'news'

Secondly, try not to blurt it out inappropriately...aim to choose an unstressed time, (i.e. not Christmas Day, their birthday, or a family party!) and have positive, written information to leave with them. Offer to come back or phone later to answer questions they may have. Do not get into a verbal fight, say things which can't be mended and slam out of the house.

Thirdly, if the atmosphere between you is already a tense one, or you have been away from home, perhaps you may need to meet them half way, explain how hard it has been for you, (say sorry about past problems if necessary) and assure them that you love them.

Yes, you are the 'child' but you may need to be the leader until they get over the first emotional upheaval. They will need time, maybe lots of time, and support. Explain that being gay is not a 'choice' or 'lifestyle' and that they didn't 'cause' it. But that to be happy you need to openly be yourself.

Remember when you realised you were not heterosexual and how long it took you to sort out your feelings? Parents too, although truly loving you, may have had really strong conditioning, and decades of misinformation to rethink and overcome. This may be social, religious, or a deep fear of the unknown, a feeling of a lack of control, and a mistaken, but real sense of loss.

Understand that they may react in many ways (or a combination of) ...fear for you, grief, anger, shock, guilt and more. These emotions are genuine and because they love you... not because they don't! Just as you do not fit the heterosexual expectations you learned and grew up with, you no longer fit many of their previous ideas of what they expected and hoped for you.

Mums, particularly may cry and do a 'guilt' trip, Dads are more likely to go quiet or be angry.

Other parents hope that if they ignore the news, 'it will go away, some will want to fix 'it' in various ways... because that's what parents do when their kids seem to be 'hurt'!

Yes of course you are still you, but by coming out as gay you throw them into unknown territory. In fact it is because they are heterosexual that it takes time for their intellectual and emotional understanding to catch up, adjust, and fully understand that being gay is an entirely whole way of 'being'...just as their sexuality is for them!

If there is no bridging the gap, just walk away for a while and use your 'gay' family for love and support, to be the very best person you can be... but leave an opening for the future...keep in touch. Life has a way of teaching all of us lessons, and even five or ten years down the track your parents may find they've gradually come to understand...or you may visit but not force the situation...however, never give up... there is always hope.

By Terry Stewart

COMING OUT TO YOUR PARENTS



PFLAG South

PARENTS FAMILIES AND FRIENDS OF LESBIANS AND GAYS