

All you need is Love PFLAG



PARENTS, **F**AMILIES AND **F**RRIENDS OF THE ATLANTA AREA **L**ESBIAN **A**ND **G**AY, **B**I, **T**RANS & **Q**UESTIONING **C**OMMUNITY



What is PFLAG?

“PFLAG” is Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays. We are a national support, education and advocacy organization for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, their families, friends and allies. With 200,000 members and supporters, and local affiliates in more than 500 communities across the U.S. and abroad, PFLAG is the largest grassroots-based family organization of its kind. PFLAG is a non-profit organization and is not affiliated with any religious or political institutions.

What we have learned

Gay people are everywhere. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are found in families from all corners of the earth, from every culture, religion and ethnic group. One of every four families has a gay or lesbian member.

Gay people are healthy. Both the American Psychiatry Association and the American Psychological Association recognize that diverse sexual identity is not a mental disorder, but a neutral characteristic - just like being left-handed. Gay people

establish stable, long-lasting relationships, work for a living, shop, vote and pay taxes.

Gay people are responsible employees and citizens. Our gay sons and daughters are teachers, doctors, soldiers and ministers. They work in industry and are chefs, artists, lawyers, athletes, accountants, city planners and every profession and occupation in between.

Being gay is natural. Sexual orientation and gender identity are not chosen. No one knows how human sexual identity is determined. We only know that it does not change in a person's lifetime. It is discovered (or discerned) at varying times in life, and that this discernment can be heavily influenced by societal, parental and peer pressure. A gay person can either accept or mask his or her sexual identity, but can never change it. “Reparative therapy” simply does not work and just serves to makes the child more confused and depressed.

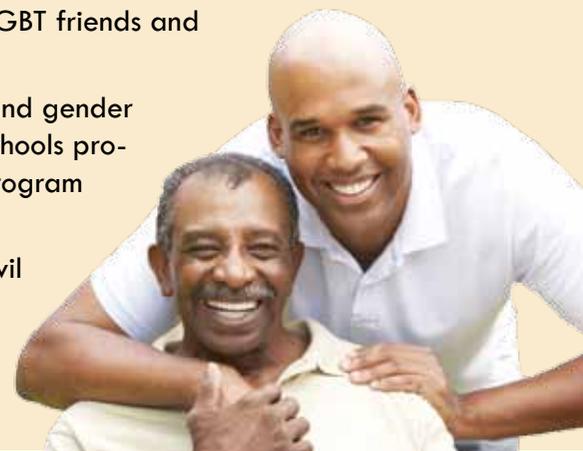
There are no patterns. We have learned our gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender sons and daughters come from all different family environments. In some families, one child is gay, in others, two or more. While our children's sexuality and gender identity is not a choice, we, their parents, choose to love and support them for their honesty and love and the faith they have placed in us.

What we do

SUPPORT We work to keep families in loving relationships by helping them understand and affirm their gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender family members. We help members of the LGBT community come out to their loved ones and friends. We provide allies with the tools to stand up to the harassment and discrimination against their LGBT friends and family.

EDUCATE We seek to dispel the myths and misinformation that surround sexual orientation and gender identity by providing educational presentations through our Speakers' Bureau. Our Safe Schools program works to keep all kids safe from bullying and harassment. Our Straight for Equality program strengthens potential allies in the workplace, the religious arena and in community groups.

ADVOCATE We write and visit our political representatives and call for equal human and civil rights. We write to the editors of newspapers and speak to the media at every occasion possible. We seek to change hearts and minds, often one person at a time. We are committed to securing the same basic rights, liberties, and opportunities for our LGBT children, to which all Americans are entitled.



“My son just told me he’s gay. Is it my fault? What should I do?”

It’s no coincidence that the suicide rate of gay and lesbian youth is five times the national average when you consider that many parents will reject their own children when they learn that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. Your son has revealed his sexuality to you because he loves you and wants to be honest with you - just how you raised him to be. He’s probably known this for a while and decided that now is the right time to share this with you. It is normal to wonder if something you did while raising him caused him to be this way. As we learn more about the origins of homosexuality, it is becoming increasingly clear that these orientations have their origins very early in life and are unchangeable. The most important thing you can do right now is to tell your son you love him and that you accept him for who he is, just as he is. Come to a PFLAG meeting and talk to other parents who are going through the same journey. We’re confident you’ll find the answers you seek.

“My friend came out to me as a lesbian - how can I support her?”

Coming out is a very personal process and the fact that your friend chose to tell you about her sexuality means that she has a great deal of trust and respect for you. The best thing you can do as a friend, right now, is to listen and support her in her coming out process. She may not be out to her family or other friends, so she may be counting on your understanding. Respect your friend’s confidentiality. She is probably not ready to tell others right away and may want to tell people in her own way, when she is ready. Ask any questions you may have, but be prepared that your friend may not have all the answers. You can save some questions for later or, better yet, you can find some answers together. Bring your friend to a PFLAG meeting with you. You can talk to other LGBT people and their parents to find out how you can better support your friend and make her coming out journey a fulfilling one. Your friend is fortunate to have you in her life!

What’s next?

Come to your first PFLAG meeting! A PFLAG meeting is not a class or a workshop. It is a place where LGBT people, their parents, families and friends gather to listen and talk about coming out and being come out to. You are free to just listen in, but in this warm and supportive atmosphere, many newcomers find that they are able to put troubling thoughts and fears into words for the first time and receive reassurance, guidance and facts. All conversations are considered confidential and are not discussed beyond the room. Groups are small and personal and led by a trained facilitator .

We hold regular free monthly PFLAG support meetings in Atlanta, Marietta, Johns Creek/Alpharetta, Peachtree City, Athens and Macon. Our entire up-to-date meeting schedule is available on our website www.pflagatl.org where links to all our regional chapters are available

Support Us! PFLAG is a non-profit volunteer-run community organization run by moms, dads and kids - just like your family! We need your donations to keep going! Make a donation or become a member today at www.pflagatl.org

Find us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/pflagatlanta

“I want to come out to my parents - but I’m scared. What if they reject me?”

Coming out to your parents can be scary. You’re probably wondering if now is the best time and how they might react to the news. Many people who have come out as LGBT to their parents have a much closer and more meaningful relationship as a result. However, before you come out to your parents, ask yourself - are you financially dependent on them? We recommend that if you are at all concerned that your parents will not accept you, you wait till you are more independent in terms of housing and finances. When you do have the conversation, focus it around your feelings and your personal experiences. Anticipate that your parents may believe myths and misconceptions about gays and lesbians.

Be patient and give your parents enough time to absorb what you have just told them. Come to a PFLAG meeting and talk to other people about their coming out experiences. Once you do come out, encourage your parents to attend a meeting with you. You will find friends who will support and guide your family on this journey.

“I’m straight, but I’m tired of hearing my co-workers make anti-gay jokes. What can I do to help?”

Sadly, some people who would not dream of making a joke about someone else’s gender, race or religion, consider it acceptable to make jokes about another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity. Often they do not realize that there may be people in their midst who are themselves gay or have LGBT family members. These people might feel uneasy or even threatened by those remarks. The good news is that today most Fortune 500 companies, and increasingly, smaller companies, have a zero-tolerance policy towards discrimination of any kind. If you witness unthinking and hateful slurs towards any group, stand up and challenge the person who made those remarks. Frequently the person when made to think about the consequences of his or her remarks, will recognize how those words could damage and destroy people. Stand up against ignorance and bigotry!



Testimonial from a PFLAG Dad

“PFLAG is a place of hope, peace, optimism, and encouragement. It helped me accept, enjoy, and stand up for my gay son. It demonstrated unconditional love and acceptance when my church refused to do so. Showed me how blessed I was to have a gay child. Showed me how liberating it is to accept people for who they are. Helped me break down the walls of judgment and indifference I had built against sexual orientation. Taught me to be compassionate to people who are different from me.”

-- David