



FAITH IN OUR FAMILIES

Parents, Families and Friends Talk About Religion and Sexual Orientation or Gender Identity

"Our guidepost has always been unconditional love for our kids. We were observant Jews — conservative — not orthodox, not Reform. We were aware that there were lines in the Old Testament that prohibited gay relationships. Back when my daughter came out to us, the conservative seminaries held homosexuality as taboo. However, we didn't have a problem reconciling these views because our kids always come first."

Discovering that a family member or friend is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) can pose new questions about your faith and may prompt you to re-evaluate beliefs that you previously took for granted. While this can seem scary it can also be the beginning of a new period of learning and exploration. At Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) we encourage you to ask questions about sexual orientation and about your faith community.

A strong support system can be helpful during this time. Many people chose to turn to their traditional support system: clergy and other faith leaders. Depending on your faith community's teaching and leadership however, they may or may not be in a position to help. Many religious denominations are studying their positions on sexual orientation. Other religions or denominations have historically been unsupportive. You may first want to explore the attitudes about LGBT people in your faith community.

Exploring your faith from a new perspective and fresh needs may be difficult at first as many people have been taught to not question their faith tradition. It is OK to ask questions both about your loved one's sexual orientation as well as your faith community. PFLAG encourages you to explore different interpretations of scripture. Widely respected biblical scholars disagree about the interpretations of the scriptures. Passages about homosexuality are no exception.

Learning that a loved one is LGBT can be a challenge if you feel it is at odds with your faith tradition. However, being LGBT does not impact a person's ability to be moral and spiritual any more than being heterosexual does. Many LGBT people are religious and active in their own faith communities. It is up to you to explore, question and make choices in order to reconcile religion with sexual orientation and/or gender identity. For some this means working for change within their faith community, and for others it means leaving it.

You will find LGBT people or their loved ones in almost every faith group across the country. You are not alone. There are a number of faith organizations that do positive work for our LGBT loved ones. In addition to worship services a number of organizations offer resources specific to their faith work.

"I first spoke publicly about my gay son in a speech about our life to my congregation. My voice shook terribly. Half of the people applauded, half sat on their hands. Since that first experience my husband and I have continued to be involved — even on a national level. I have testified before the general assembly council and met with pastors across the country."

To learn more about resources for many different faith communities check out the full length Faith and Our Families resource at www.pflag.org or find a chapter in your area.