

## We Are United Methodist Parents...

### ...and We Understand Your Journey

Often, by the time we openly acknowledge the truth about our child's sexual orientation or gender identity, he or she has already been through a long period of discernment and self-realization.

Each of us in the Parents Reconciling Network is a proud United Methodist parent of a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or intersex child. Our experiences have taught us that unconditional love for our children eases their journey, increases their self-acceptance, fosters healthy development, and strengthens family bonds.

## The Parents Reconciling Network Offers:

- ▶ Printed materials including biblical and spiritual resources and suggestions for obtaining various media resources.
- ▶ Individual consultation by email, phone, letter, or in person. Connection with volunteer coordinators is available in many Annual Conferences.
- ▶ Our newsletter annual, *Kindred Connection*
- ▶ A PRN Contact List on the RMN website.
- ▶ Church-wide study courses and information to guide your church toward becoming a Reconciling Congregation.
- ▶ Special sessions for parents at the national, biannual gathering of the Reconciling Ministries Network.

## Some Additional Resources

- ▶ **PFLAG** (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays)—[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)
- ▶ **The Human Rights Campaign**—[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org) (click on "Religion and Faith")

## Our Mission:

Through consultation, resourcing and small group interactions, Parents Reconciling Network helps parents support their LGBTQI children and each other, shares information, and works for understanding and justice.

"Welcome one another, therefore,  
just as Christ has welcomed you."

—Romans 15:7

## We're Working to Make Church a Safe Place for Our Youth

The Parents Reconciling Network (PRN) believes it is time for United Methodist parents to connect in a local and nationwide program of support, advocacy and witness for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and intersex (LGBTQI) individuals. We are helping congregations and the entire church realize that change is coming, justice will prevail, and our United Methodist Church must be open to all of God's children ...including ours!



## We Invite Your Participation!

Parents Reconciling Network is an extension ministry of the Reconciling Ministries Network. For more information, to join, or to send support, contact us at:

[www.RMNetwork.org](http://www.RMNetwork.org)  
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773-736-5526

Local contact:



Find us on  
Facebook!

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## When Your Child Is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Queer



## How it changes your family picture:

- ▶ Who are we now?
- ▶ What about my dreams and expectations?
- ▶ Where can we turn for support?
- ▶ What will we tell our friends?
- ▶ How will my child be treated by the church?

## Making Sense of It All...



# When Our Children “Come Out”: Their Process and Ours

## The Stages of Coming Out (at Any Age)

### 1 Self Discovery as Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, or Transgender

For LGBTQ people, self discovery is more than awareness of same-gender attraction or identification with a sex other than that assigned at birth. It may also include confusion and anxiety, denial and repression of feelings, attempts to “pass” and behave as heterosexual, and sometimes a religious commitment to “overcome” their sexuality or gender identity. Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people may be fairly closeted at this point; however, many seek out information about homosexuality and transgender identity.

### 2 Disclosure to Others

Sharing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity with a close friend or family member is the first step in this stage. Rejection may cause a return to Stage 1, but a positive response can lead to higher self-esteem and greater self-acceptance. As parents, the way we respond when our children come out will deeply shape the rest of their lives. Disclosure is an on-going process.

### 3 Socialization with Other Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transgender People

Connection with other gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people can diminish feelings of isolation and estrangement. A positive sense of self is strengthened by validation, education, support and acceptance. Positive gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender role models are particularly important during this stage.

### 4 Positive Self-Identification

This stage includes feeling good about one’s self, seeking positive relationships, and experiencing a sense of peace and fulfillment. Here, one begins to realize that same-gender attraction and behavior is a normal and healthy expression of human love, fully as natural and moral as other-gender attraction and behavior. Transgender individuals find that living as the gender with which they identify feels honest and true.

### 5 Integration and Acceptance

This stage involves an openness and non-defensiveness about one’s sexual orientation or gender identity. This integration may manifest itself in different ways. Some may need to openly proclaim their sexuality or gender change to others as a way of ending the invisibility of being gay or transgender. Others may be quietly open, not announcing their sexual orientation or gender identity but being available to support others. Affirming relationships, family, friends and communities of faith greatly impact an individual’s ability to be fully integrated and self-accepting.

## Steps to Acceptance for Parents

As parents, we may take some of these steps quickly and others more slowly. We may skip some and visit others more than once. These stages are not numbered because this is not a linear journey. By God’s grace, many parents have arrived at acceptance, and we pray that you will, too.

**Denial:** Many of us might wonder if our children are lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender even before they tell us but we suppress and deny this possibility because we’re afraid of what the truth might do to our family.

**Grief:** We grieve the loss of the heterosexual person or son or daughter we had created in our minds and the disappearance of the life we had envisioned for him or her.

**Blame / Guilt:** In this stage, many parents feel a tremendous amount of guilt and want someone to blame. We blame ourselves, wondering if we did something wrong. We blame our children for “changing” and for forcing us to readjust our vision. We might even blame their partners and other gay or transgender people incorrectly believing that our child was drawn into this life.

**Fear:** We fear breaking the silence and telling the truth. We fear being judged and losing our friends, family, and faith community. We fear the hatred, violence, and discrimination our children may have to encounter and endure.

**Anger:** Anger comes in many forms: at ourselves for not recognizing the truth sooner so we could have better supported our children; at God for “allowing” our precious loved ones to be gay or

transgender, thereby making their lives more difficult; and at the church for rejecting or condemning LGBTQ people and their families.

**Self-Realization:** With this stage comes the realization that it is we, not our children, who must change. We need to re-draw our family picture to include this new reality, support our child and the family they have or will create, surround ourselves with other loving parents of LGBTQ people, find a nurturing faith community, and learn all we can.

**Acceptance:** Quite simply, this means loving our LGBTQ children, not in spite of who they are, but because of who they are. God created them, loves them completely, and honors the beautiful truth of their lives – and so do we. We know that homosexuality and transgender identity are not anyone’s fault, they are not illnesses or diseases, and no one can be talked into or out of being gay or transgender. They are normal variants of human sexuality and gender identity and most scientists agree sexual orientation and gender identity are both the result of complex interactions of biological, genetic and hormonal factors.

## A Life-Long Journey

Coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (LGBTQ) doesn’t happen just once. It is a life-long process of discovering, accepting, and sharing one’s sexual orientation or gender identity with others. In our church and society, most people assume that everyone is heterosexual and living in the gender they were assigned at birth. Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people must constantly decide under what circumstances and to whom they will disclose their sexual orientation or gender identity. Coming out is an important step in self-acceptance and in fostering emotional, physical, and spiritual health. For LGBTQ people, coming out helps end the pain of secrecy and isolation.

The Stages of Coming Out were excerpted and modified with permission from Richard Niolon, Ph.D., [www.PsychPage.com](http://www.PsychPage.com).

