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“Coming Out: Resources for Parents whose Children may be Questioning Their Sexual Identity “

Thinking that a child might be lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) can raise many questions for a parent. Often a parent is unsure whether they should talk to their child about this. Communicating is almost always a good thing. If you feel that your child might be LGBT, first think about what feelings this brings up for you. If this isn't something you are comfortable with, it might help to know that just about all mainstream mental health experts now believe that someone's sexual orientation, regardless of whether they are gay, lesbian, straight or bisexual, is something that forms in each person either before we are born, or within the very first few years of each person's life. So nothing causes people to “turn” gay, just like nothing causes people to “turn” straight. People are whatever sexual orientation they are, often from birth. Being gay or straight has nothing to do with the way a child was raised, or who did or didn't raise them. Once you feel ready to talk with your child, it can help to find a quiet and private time, and let them know that you realize that some children can be gay, lesbian or bisexual, just as some can be straight. If you think your child may be transgender, letting them know that you understand that the gender a person feels on the inside might not always match the gender they look on the outside of their body. And you didn't want to make any assumptions, so you thought you would ask if this is something they might want to talk about. Letting them know that you are respectful of whatever they are, and open to talking, can make a huge difference for a child. But remember too, that not all kids are ready to talk. But as long as you've let them know that you are a safe person for them to talk to, you've laid the important groundwork for a discussion in the future, when they are ready. And if your child does come-out to you, an excellent organization that helps parents of LGBT kids is called PFLAG. They have local chapters throughout the country, and you can learn more about them at www.pflag.org.

Here are some resources for LGBT individuals to contact if they need someone else to talk to about the subject:

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- **The Trevor Project** (www.thetrevorproject.org)— The Trevor Project provides phone, instant messaging, and text services for LGBTQ individuals to communicate with a trained specialist; an online social networking space for youth and their friends and allies in the LGBTQ community; and an online resource center.
- **GLBT National Help Center** (www.glbthotline.org) — The GLBT National Help Center provides multiple hotlines for peer counseling; online peer chat options; and local resource searches for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and questioning people.
- **Trans Lifeline** (www.translifeline.org/) — Trans Lifeline provides a hotline — staffed by transgender people, for transgender people — to provide individual support for the needs of members of the community.

This article was adapted from the LGBT National Hotline website.