

LOVE CALLS BACK:

Reconnecting With LGBTQ+ Loved Ones



So an LGBTQ+ loved one came out to you. Perhaps you were surprised (or perhaps you weren't) but your response wasn't what you (or they) hoped it might be. Now, they are reaching out to you. And you're wondering, "How should I respond?"

First and foremost, as much as you are able, lead with love. No matter how easy or difficult learning about a loved one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression is for you, it is very likely they are worried about losing your love, or about your reaction and response, and may even be worried about losing their family and their home.

Remember: When a loved one comes out or discloses their sexual orientation or gender identity or expression to you, it is not about you. But it can be about how you respond.

Although there is no one perfect way to react, your response will make an impact on both your loved one's well being and your relationship with them moving forward. Therefore, while it is sometimes challenging to control an initial negative response or worried feeling, that should never dissuade you from trying again and doing better; it is always possible to change course and respond more positively as you move forward.

If you are not in a place of support and understanding, do your best to try and remember the following: Positive, supportive responses lead to healthier LGBTQ+ people.

What does this mean for you? First and foremost, it means finding a place for yourself—away from your child or loved one—to share the emotions you are having if you are concerned that they might have a negative impact. This allows you to be there for your loved one, as best you can, in a positive and supportive way, while at the same time giving yourself time and space to honor your own emotions as you work through them. PFLAG is an essential resource, and there are many ways to connect: [chapters have local in-person meetings, Facebook pages and Facebook groups](#); they also have telephone helplines, and can be reached via email. To find your local chapter and get their phone numbers, email addresses, and websites, visit pflag.org/findachapter, or [contact the national office at chapterservices@pflag.org](mailto:chapterservices@pflag.org) for referral information.

Here are some positive steps you can take, even as you reach out for your support for yourself:

Speak with—and listen to—your loved one about their LGBTQ+ identity. Whether they want to talk about their hopes for the future, or a situation that happened in school or at work that day, the prospect for open discussion is endless—especially if you lead with a gentle open-ended question. Don't push, and really listen when they talk. If you make a misstep in your response, apologize; no one is perfect. It is in making the attempt that you show your love and support.

Support your child's LGBTQ+ identity, including their gender expression, even if you feel uncomfortable. From welcoming their LGBTQ+ friends into your home, to taking them shopping for that just-right piece of clothing they've been asking for, to helping provide access to age-appropriate resources, such as books and films, showing an interest in their lives, inclusive of their whole selves, is a subtle-but-powerful way to show that you care.

Express your unconditional love for your child or loved one. Saying "I love you" is, of course, one obvious way to express your love. However actions speak louder than words, and taking any of these previous steps will help ensure your loved one that they have your support no matter what.

After more than 46 years of working with families, our experience tells us that your unconditional love, even during the rough times or after a misstep, is the most important thing to remember.

The process of reacting and responding to your child or loved one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression disclosure is an opportunity to bring you, your loved one, and your family closer. And, if you aren't at a point where you can come out loud and proud as the parent, caregiver, or loved one of a person who is LGBTQ+, there may very likely come a point where you can begin to do so. Be patient with yourself, patient with your loved one, and remember: **You always have a home in PFLAG.**

For expanded resources and more FAQs, find free downloads of all of PFLAG National's publications at pflag.org/publications.