

LOVE CALLS BACK:

Reconnecting With Loved Ones After Coming Out as LGBTQ+



So you came out to your parents, a family member, or friend. Perhaps they were surprised (or perhaps they weren't) but their response wasn't what you hoped it might be. Now, they are reaching out to you to reconnect. And you're wondering, "How should I respond?" Or whether you should respond at all.

If you've already tried once--or several times--to share your authentic truth with someone who was less than welcoming, deciding to attempt reconnection can be risky. Remember: You deserve to be treated with dignity and respect, and reconnecting on your own terms should only happen if you feel safe to do so. There is no requirement that you come out or reconnect, just as there is no one "right way" to come out or disclose. How you approach these conversations may depend on your age, cultural background, faith background, location, access to support and resources, and more.

Here are some suggestions that might set you up for a productive conversation:

Stay safe from violence and abuse. If harm was part of the coming-out narrative the first time, consider carefully whether you are in a safe place to reconnect with this person. If you may be at further risk, consider your options and have alternatives lined up should things become challenging (e.g. a trusted friend who can drive you home from the conversation, or with whom you can stay afterward).

Have the conversation in a comfortable environment. Meeting on neutral ground or on "turf" that is yours is a great way to make sure you're comfortable from the outset.

Traveling to their home or a place that they typically spend time might not be comfortable for you or put you on solid ground from the outset. Meeting on your own terms in a place where you are comfortable will also give you the ability to leave quickly and give your loved one some space to process should they need it...and in truth, both of you will probably need that space!

Consider the right timing. When considering reconnecting with a loved one, pick a time when they are more likely to be relaxed and not pressured by work, family worries, or the holidays.

Have some resources ready. Think about what might help for different groups (e.g., parents, work colleagues, people of faith). [The PFLAG National website](https://www.pflag.org) is a great place to find resources, including material from great programmatic partners who also have materials available to you.

Have a supportive person at the ready. A support system is important when you're working to reconnect with someone who may not have been supportive the first time. You'll want at least one person around you who cares about you and will be there for you, whether it's just to talk or to give you a hug when you need one, or to give you

a place to stay, if necessary. If you don't feel that you already have people like that, contact the nearest PFLAG chapter. You can find yours at pflag.org/find.

Ready to move forward? You may want to consider including the following as part of the conversation:

How you identify and what it means.

Times change and so does terminology. Don't assume that your loved ones know the difference, for example, between transgender and nonbinary. This is a learning opportunity for them, and a chance for you to be very specific in sharing your identity.

Why you're attempting to reconnect now.

Perhaps you've heard through the grapevine that this person is open to hearing from you, or perhaps they've already reached out to let you know that they miss you. Whatever the reason, it's good to state it clearly so that they know you're open to the possibilities and to possibly meeting them where they are.

How you're feeling as you come out.

It's important to be honest about how you feel in the moment, whether that's fear, nervousness, anger, or happiness. Being truthful about your emotions will let your loved one know that they can be truthful about theirs as well.

Guidance about confidentiality and how you'd like them to act. It's important to explicitly state whether or not you are out to others, and how much (or how little) you're okay with having them share information about you beyond this conversation. It's best not to assume they will know not to share it with anyone; state it outright and protect yourself.

Rather than talking about the "Coming Out" experience--which is usually not a one-time thing and looks different for each person--we might talk about this as an "Inviting In" experience. The idea that sexuality and gender identity are each individual's to share if and when they want to, and it's your choice as to how and when you re-invite someone in. After more than 46 years of working with families, our experience tells us that even the worst coming-out experience can be followed up eventually with understanding and unconditional love.

PFLAG is here for you: It's not your job to educate your loved ones or support them as they work through their varied and potentially challenging emotions. PFLAG chapter members can help with that heavy lifting, and help your loved ones reconcile their feelings and move forward on their journey to support and love.

Above all, practice self care, be patient with yourself 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.