

**PFLAG**



# **At Ease**

**Support for Military Families  
with LGBTQ+ Kids**

**HELP**

If you or a loved one needs immediate assistance, we encourage you to seek out help immediately.

For LGBTQ+ youth, please contact The Trevor Project online at [thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now](https://thetrevorproject.org/pages/get-help-now), or call one of the following:

### **Helplines**

**The Trevor Project:** (866) 488-7386

**National Suicide Prevention Lifeline:** (800) 273-8255

**Trans Lifeline:** (877) 565-8860

**Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Info:**  
(800) 342-AIDS (2437)

Spanish service: (800) 344-7432

TDD service for the deaf: (800) 243-7889

**The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender National Hotline:** (888) 843-4564

**The GLBT National Youth Talkline (youth serving youth through age 25):** (800) 246-7743

**The National Runaway Switchboard:**  
(800) RUNAWAY (786-2929)

**Crisis Text Line:** Text START to 741-741

**U.S. National Domestic Violence Hotline:**  
(800) 799-7233 (English and Spanish)  
(800) 787-3224 (TTY)

**Rape Abuse and Incest National Network (RAINN):**  
(800) 656-HOPE | (800) 810-7440 (TTY)

# ABOUT PFLAG

PFLAG is an organization of LGBTQ+ people, parents, families, and allies who work together to create an equitable and inclusive world. We are hundreds of thousands of people and hundreds of chapters from coast to coast who are leading with love to support families, educate allies, and advocate for just, equitable, and inclusive legislation and policies.

Since our founding in 1973, PFLAG works every day to ensure LGBTQ+ people everywhere are safe, celebrated, empowered and loved. Learn more, find support, donate, and take action at [PFLAG.org](https://pflag.org).

**Our Mission.** To create a caring, just, and affirming world for LGBTQ+ people and those who love them.

**Our Vision.** An equitable, inclusive world where every LGBTQ+ person is safe, celebrated, empowered, and loved.

## About this Publication

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Written by Becca Stewart

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# WELCOME

Welcome, military families—we're glad you're here! If you're reading this booklet, it's likely that your child or another loved one recently came out to you. That is, they told you that they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, queer, or questioning (LGBTQ+).

## For Parents

For some parents, this news doesn't come as a surprise. For others, it might feel like it came out of nowhere. No matter how prepared or unprepared you were for this moment, you are in good company. PFLAG National and our hundreds of chapters nationwide are full of parents and caregivers just like you, coming together and learning how to best support their kids.

Military families with LGBTQ+ dependents have a unique set of challenges. Moving every few years means reevaluating the cultural norms, laws, schools, and support of LGBTQ+ people at each location. It can feel overwhelming trying to find support for your LGBTQ+ child and yourself.

We're here to tell you that you're not alone. For nearly five decades, all kinds of people have come to PFLAG seeking support—including military families.

In this publication, you'll find valuable information designed to help you navigate the military system and find the support that your child— and your entire family—need. You'll also hear from other military families, parents, and youth on similar journeys. Some have since retired from military service, their LGBTQ+ children now grown. Others are still very much in the thick of it, with active duty service members and spouses serving our country while raising LGBTQ+ youth.

We hope you will find this publication both enjoyable and informative. The staff and volunteers of PFLAG National feel honored to work with military families to help them better support their LGBTQ+ loved ones.



**“Listen without judgment and ask questions.  
I knew enough to know that I knew little  
to nothing about the LGBTQ+ community.  
I learned to ask questions, research, and say  
‘I am sorry’ a lot. I am still learning and I am  
grateful our son is patient with us.”**

– Marine Corps Spouse, Parent of a Gay Son



To find a PFLAG chapter near you, please visit [pflag.org/findachapter](https://pflag.org/findachapter). Military families without access to local PFLAG chapters can contact us at [info@pflag.org](mailto:info@pflag.org), on Facebook at [facebook.com/pflag](https://facebook.com/pflag), on Twitter at [twitter.com/pflag](https://twitter.com/pflag), or via Instagram at [Instagram.com/pflag](https://Instagram.com/pflag).



## **For LGBTQ+ Youth**

This publication will help LGBTQ+ military children, teens, and young adult dependents navigate this sometimes-bumpy road. Being a military kid isn't easy, and being an LGBTQ+ military kid comes with particular challenges. By reading this publication, you will discover how and when to come out to your military parent(s), how to find support in a military community, and where you can go to discover additional resources.

You're no stranger to change and hardship. Discovering who you are is yet another step on your extraordinary life journey. It won't happen overnight, and that's okay. You are not alone. We hope this publication will help you navigate being both a "Military Brat" and a member of the LGBTQ+ community.

We designed the second part of this publication just for you!

# GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The following terms will be helpful in your coming-out journey. For the full PFLAG National glossary of terms, visit [pflag.org/glossary](https://pflag.org/glossary).

**Ally:** A term generally relating to individuals who support marginalized groups. In the LGBTQ+ community, this term is used to describe an individual who is supportive of LGBTQ+ individuals and the community, either personally or as an advocate. Allies include both heterosexual and cisgender people who advocate for equality in partnership with LGBTQ+ people, as well as people within the LGBTQ+ community who advocate for others in the community. “Ally” is not an identity, and allyship is an ongoing process of learning that includes action.

**Bisexual:** Commonly referred to as bi or bi+. According to bi+ educator and advocate Robyn Ochs, the term refers to a person who acknowledges in themselves the potential to be attracted—romantically, emotionally and/or sexually—to people of more than one gender, not necessarily at the same time, in the same way, or to the same degree. The “bi” in bisexual can refer to attraction to genders similar to and different from one’s own. People who identify as bisexual need not

have had equal sexual or romantic experience—or equal levels of attraction—with people across genders, nor any experience at all; attraction and self-identification determine orientation.

**Cisgender** (pronounced sis-gender): A term used to refer to an individual whose gender identity aligns with the sex assigned to them at birth. The prefix cis- comes from the Latin word for “on the same side as.” People who are both cisgender and heterosexual are sometimes referred to as cishet (pronounced “sis-het”) individuals. The term cisgender is not a slur. People who are not trans should avoid calling themselves “normal” and instead refer to themselves as cisgender or cis.

**Gay:** A term used to describe people who are emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to people of the same gender (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian is often a preferred term for women, though many women use the term gay to describe themselves.

People who are gay need not have had any sexual experience. Attraction and self-identification determines sexual orientation, not the gender or sexual orientation of one's partner. The term should not be used as an umbrella term for LGBTQ+ people, e.g. "the gay community," because it excludes other sexual orientations and genders. Avoid using gay in a disparaging manner, e.g. "that's so gay," as a synonym for stupid or bad.

**Gender Expression:** The manner in which a person communicates about gender to others through external means such as clothing, appearance, or mannerisms. This communication may be conscious or subconscious and may or may not reflect their gender identity or sexual orientation. While most people's understandings of gender expressions relate to masculinity and femininity, there are countless combinations that may incorporate both masculine and feminine expressions, or neither, through androgynous expressions. All people have gender expressions, and an individual's gender expression does not automatically imply one's gender identity.

**Gender Identity:** A person's deeply held core sense of self in relation to gender (see Gender). Gender identity does not always correspond to biological sex. People become aware of their gender identity at many different stages of life, from as early as 18 months and into adulthood. According to Gender Spectrum, one study showed that "...the average age of self-realization for the child that they were transgender or non-binary

was 7.9 years old, but the average age when they disclosed their understanding of their gender was 15.5 years old." Gender identity is a separate concept from sexuality and gender expression.

**Heterosexual:** Refers to a person who is sexually attracted to a person of a different gender or sex. Also referred to as straight.

**Homosexual:** A term to describe gay, lesbian, or queer people which may be offensive depending on the speaker. Originally used as a scientific or clinical term to describe LGBTQ+ people, the word has been reclaimed by the LGBTQ+ community and may be colloquially used by an LGBTQ+ person to reference themselves or another member of the community. Non-LGBTQ+ people should avoid using the term.

**Lesbian:** Refers to a woman who is emotionally, romantically, and/or physically attracted to other women. People who are lesbians need not have had any sexual experience: Attraction and self-identification determines orientation, not the gender or sexual orientation of one's partner.

**LGBTQ+:** An acronym that collectively refers to individuals who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer, sometimes stated as LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender) or, historically, GLBT (gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender). The addition of the Q for queer is a more recently preferred version of the acronym as cultural opinions of the term queer focus increasingly on its positive, reclaimed definition. The

Q can also stand for questioning, referring to those who are still exploring their own sexuality and/or gender. The “+” represents those who are part of the community but for whom LGBTQ does not accurately capture or reflect their identity.

**Nonbinary:** Refers to people who do not subscribe to the gender binary. They might exist between or beyond the man-woman binary. Some use the term exclusively, while others may use it interchangeably with terms like genderqueer, genderfluid, gender nonconforming, gender diverse, or gender expansive. It can also be combined with other descriptors e.g. nonbinary woman or transmasculine nonbinary. Language is imperfect, so it’s important to trust and respect the words that nonbinary people use to describe their genders and experiences. Nonbinary people may understand their identity as falling under the transgender umbrella, and may thus identify as transgender. Sometimes abbreviated as NB or Enby, the term NB has been used historically to mean non-Black, so those referring to nonbinary people should avoid using NB.

**Pronouns:** The words used to refer to a person other than their name. Common pronouns are they/them, he/him, and she/her. Neopronouns are pronouns created to be specifically gender neutral, including xe/xem, ze/zir, and fae/faer. Pronouns are sometimes called Personal Gender Pronouns, or PGPs. For those who

use pronouns—and not all people do—they are not preferred, they are essential.

**Queer:** A term used by some LGBTQ+ people to describe themselves and/or their community. Reclaimed from its earlier negative use—and valued by some for its defiance—the term is also considered by some to be inclusive of the entire community and by others who find it to be an appropriate term to describe their more fluid identities. Traditionally a negative or pejorative term for people who are LGBTQ+, some people within the community dislike the term. Due to its varying meanings, use this word only when self-identifying or quoting an individual who self-identifies as queer (i.e., “My cousin identifies as queer” or “My cousin is a queer person”).

**Sexual Orientation:** The sexual attraction toward other people or no people. While sexual activity involves the choices one makes regarding behavior, one’s sexual activity does not define one’s sexual orientation. Sexual orientation is part of the human condition, and all people have one. Typically, it is attraction that helps determine orientation.

**Transgender:** Often shortened to trans, from the Latin prefix for “on a different side as.” A term describing a person’s gender identity that does not necessarily match their assigned sex at birth. Transgender people may or may not decide to alter their bodies hormonally and/or surgically to match their gender identity. This word is also used as an umbrella term to describe groups of people who transcend

conventional expectations of gender identity or expression—such groups include, but are not limited to, people who identify as transsexual, genderqueer, gender variant, gender diverse, and androgynous. See above for common acronyms and terms including female to male (or FTM), male to female (or MTF), assigned male at birth (or AMAB), assigned female at birth (or AFAB), nonbinary, and gender-expansive. “Trans” is often considered more inclusive than transgender because it includes transgender, transsexual, transmasculine, transfeminine, and those who simply use the word trans.

## **Military Glossary of Terms and Acronyms**

In addition to the terms listed above, we are including some military-specific terms and definitions that you might find helpful as you read this publication.

### **Airman and Family Readiness**

**Center (AFRC):** The Air Force’s program designed to provide education, resources, and support to military families.

### **Exceptional Family Member**

**Program (EFMP):** A mandatory enrollment program for military spouses, children, and other dependents who need specialized care. Those enrolled in EFMP may receive additional physical, emotional, developmental, or intellectual support.

### **Family Readiness Group (FRG):**

A command-sponsored support structure for Army, Marine, Navy, and Coast Guard families. Though known by different names in each branch, these Readiness Groups provide similar services: education, support, and resources for military families.

### **Military and Family Life Counseling**

**(MFLC):** Trained mental health professionals who provide non-medical counseling for military service members and their families. Most installations have an MFLC available for adults and youth, providing short-term, confidential counseling.

### **Military Treatment Facility (MTF):**

A government medical facility, typically on a military installation, that provides medical care to military service members and their families.

### **Primary Care Manager (PCM):**

A Tricare beneficiary’s primary medical care provider. This provider handles the bulk of the military dependent’s medical care and can refer the dependent to specialists as needed.

### **School Liaison Officer (SLO):**

The SLO is the primary point of contact between schools and military families. SLOs facilitate school transitions, ensuring each move is as smooth as possible for the military child.



# FOR PARENTS AND FAMILIES

## **When Your Military Child Comes Out as LGBTQ+**

For any parent, learning that a child is part of the LGBTQ+ community can cause a range of emotions.

There's no denying that having an LGBTQ+ child brings questions, concerns, and challenges. However, for military families, there are additional layers of complexity. Frequent moves, command changes, and ever-shifting social and political pressures create an uncertain roadmap for military families with LGBTQ+ dependents.

Many military communities are very close knit. You might worry what other people will think. Will your child's coming out impact your friendships within your unit or career field? Will your child's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression somehow affect the service member's career?

These aren't easy questions to answer. Every situation is different. But we can tell you this: You are not alone. There are others like you, navigating military life with an LGBTQ+ child.

## **Your First Reactions**

Every parent's reaction to this news will be different. You're embarking on a new journey with your child. While many parents react immediately in a supportive and loving manner, others might respond with a combination of shock, sadness, anger, fear, or doubt. Don't beat yourself up if you didn't immediately react positively; all of your feelings are valid. We recommend you work through those complicated emotions away from your child, with a trusted friend, certified counselor, or at a peer support group with other parents, like a PFLAG meeting. If your initial response did not go the way you had hoped, it is important that you acknowledge that to your child, apologize, and keep leading with love and working to do better.

Do your best to provide a loving, supportive, and safe environment for your child, a home free from judgment. Your loved one likely had doubts and fears before coming out to you. By sharing vital insight into who they are, they have given you a precious gift. No matter how you're feeling about this news, acknowledge the bravery it took for them to confide in you.

### **Being Supportive Saves Lives**

LGBTQ+ youth are four times more likely to seriously consider suicide than their peers.<sup>1</sup> However, having even one supportive and accepting adult reduces that risk by 40%.<sup>2</sup> Simply telling your child that you love them for who they are—and you're proud of them for living their truth—can be lifesaving.

Even if you don't understand it all right away (and chances are, you won't!), tell your child that you love them. Let them know that you're willing to listen and learn. Even one supportive parent can make all the difference.



### **Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity, and Gender Expression: The Basics**

When a baby is born—and thanks to modern technology, often long before—a doctor takes a quick look at the baby's visible sex organs and assigns that baby a sex. From this assigned sex, we assume the baby's gender. This is often referred to as the “sex assigned at birth” or “assumed gender.”

Cisgender people are those whose biological anatomy matches their gender identity (those whose sex assigned at birth matches the way they feel inside). Those whose gender identity is different from their biological anatomy are transgender. Those who are nonbinary may identify as both man and woman, neither man nor woman, or a combination of the two.

A person's sense of their gender identity starts very early in life, often before we can even communicate our thoughts or feelings effectively. Those who are transgender or nonbinary might have a strong sense of gender identity early in life, while others won't experience this sense of gender identity until they are tweens, teens, or adults.

One's gender identity has to do with the self and not relationships or attraction to others.

**“We make sure he knows we love him no matter what and we will always be his biggest supporter and advocate. We are involved with PFLAG as a family in order to better understand and support not only our son but the LGBTQ+ community.”**

– Marine Corps Spouse, Parent of a Gay Son

#PFLAGProud



Sexual orientation, on the other hand, is the emotional, romantic, or sexual feelings toward other people. Those who have an attraction to those of the same gender or gender identity often identify as gay, lesbian, or bisexual.

Finally, gender expression is how a person expresses their gender through external cues like clothing, hairstyles, and mannerisms. Some people choose a gender expression that socially aligns with their gender identity, while others do not.

Sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. All different, all valid, and everyone has them!

As a parent, supporting your LGBTQ+ kid is your most important job. Additionally, as you work through your concerns and questions, it's also vital to find support for yourself in both military and civilian communities. Connect with your local PFLAG chapter, talk with a trusted friend, or find a licensed counselor who has experience working with the LGBTQ+ community.



## **Connections for Military Families of LGBTQ+ Kids**

Military families often find it more challenging to connect with others in the same situation. You might find a wonderful group at one installation only to have no resources at your next base. No matter where military life takes you, it's important to surround yourself with support, information, and encouragement.



Military families can always access civilian organizations that serve LGBTQ+ community members and allies off base. For many military families with LGBTQ+ children, connecting with a local PFLAG chapter is a priority when moving to a new area. To find a chapter near you, visit [pflag.org/findachapter](http://pflag.org/findachapter).

Additional options for support include:

- ♥ **Professional Counselors.** The military offers options for individual, couples, and family counseling services. Tricare will cover the cost of many off-base therapists. Additionally, you can access on-base services, like a chaplain or Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC). Many installations also have licensed therapists at the medical group, family advocacy center, Family Readiness Group (FRG), or Airman and Family Readiness Center (AFRC).

It is critical that you choose an LGBTQ+-affirming therapist who does not practice any methods designed to “change” your child’s sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. These practices, sometimes referred to as “conversion therapy,” are damaging, harmful, and ineffective.<sup>3</sup>

- ♥ **Faith Communities.** Many families turn to their faith communities during difficult times. However, some faiths do not accept and affirm LGBTQ+ people and can be outright harmful to LGBTQ+ youth and their families. So-called “conversion therapy” often takes place under the guise of religion.

Supporting your child does not have to mean giving up your beliefs. Many faith communities support and affirm LGBTQ+ people and their families. We recommend downloading or purchasing *Faith in Our Families*, a PFLAG publication devoted to helping people of faith reconcile their faith beliefs with their love of an LGBTQ+ family member.

- ♥ **Trusted Friends or Family Members.** Friends and family can often be a great source of comfort when your child first comes out to you. Other military spouses with LGBTQ+ kids are a valuable resource, too. However, you may want to ask your child’s permission before sharing the news with your friends and family. Your child might not be ready for other people to know, in which case, you should reconsider sharing their news with those in your circle; turn instead to PFLAG for confidential, peer-to-peer support.

- ♥ **Online Support Groups.** Thanks to technology, people can access information and support 24 hours a day, from anywhere there is internet access. There are countless groups online dedicated to educating and encouraging military families with LGBTQ+ kids. Be mindful of the content, ensuring the group is 100% affirming and accepting. But in many cases, you can find a treasure trove of support right from your computer. Nearly every PFLAG chapter has online meetings and Facebook groups. PFLAG National holds virtual meetings and can support you online.

♥ **Military-Affiliated Helping Organizations.** As a military service member or spouse, you may also want to consult with military-affiliated helping organizations like the Modern Military Association of America or their subgroup for military families with LGBTQ+ kids, MilPride.

If you're still having trouble making meaningful connections with other parents of LGBTQ+ kids, consider starting your own PFLAG chapter. There are plenty of military families with LGBTQ+ kids looking for support and community. Your outreach might help not only your family, but also others in similar situations. If you are interested in starting such a group, PFLAG National staff are here to help. Contact [chapterservices@pflag.org](mailto:chapterservices@pflag.org) to get started.

For a list of helpful resources, visit the Resources section at the end of this publication.



## **Mental Health for LGBTQ+ Military Youth**

LGBTQ+ youth need the same medical care and attention as any other military child. Whether your child chooses to disclose their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression to your PCM is entirely up to them. There may be some instances that require you to disclose, such as seeking medical intervention for a trans child.

Regardless of your child's sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, your child deserves respectful treatment from all medical professionals. If you have any concerns or questions about your child's care, do not hesitate to speak up.

Mental health is the primary concern for LGBTQ+ youth, however, it's important to know that mental health disorders are never the cause of someone being LGBTQ+. LGBTQ+ youth often experience mental health disorders because of the unique challenges they face.

### **Why Mental Health Matters**

Studies repeatedly tell us that LGBTQ+ youth are more likely to experience depression and anxiety and have higher rates of self-harm, suicidal ideation, and suicide attempts.<sup>1,2</sup> As a parent, the mental health of your LGBTQ+ child should be of top concern.

If your child is exhibiting any of the symptoms below, consult your child's doctor or a mental health professional as soon as possible:

- ♥ Feeling sad or crying, sometimes for no reason at all
- ♥ Extreme frustration or anger
- ♥ Irritability

- ♥ Sleeping too much or not enough
- ♥ Changes in eating habits
- ♥ Little interest or pleasure in doing things they once enjoyed
- ♥ Low self-esteem
- ♥ Trouble concentrating or remembering things
- ♥ A dramatic change in academic performance
- ♥ Isolation

If your child expresses any thoughts of self-harm, harming someone else, or indicates they are in any way considering suicide, do not wait. Contact 911 or your local suicide crisis hotline immediately. See the inside back cover of this publication for crisis support information, or visit [pflag.org/hotlines](https://pflag.org/hotlines) for a list of helpful crisis support resources.

## **Mental Health and Tricare**

Tricare does not require referrals for mental health counseling. If a provider takes Tricare insurance, you can schedule an appointment without seeing your PCM.

If you do not have access to an affirming mental health professional in your local area, you might consider telehealth as an alternative. Many providers now offer online counseling, which your child can access from anywhere.

There are also mental health resources available on base, including youth Military and Family Life Counselors (MFLC) and providers through family advocacy or the medical treatment facility. If you are having trouble finding a mental health provider for your LGBTQ+ child or finding a provider who accepts Tricare, contact your local patient advocacy office.



## **Informing Your Chain of Command**

Military service members are not obligated to reveal the sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression of anyone in their family, even dependents who might be on EFMP status.

If the leaders in your chain of command are supportive, safe, and affirming, you might choose to disclose that your loved one is in the LGBTQ+ community. While this is not necessary or required by any means, your chain of command might be able to direct you to additional resources.

Note that if you enroll your child in EFMP for any reason, leadership at both the losing and gaining installations receive notification ONLY of their EFMP status.

Your child's medical record, including any diagnoses that enrolled them in EFMP, will not be disclosed.

Decide on a case-by-case basis whether to tell your chain of command or other service members in your unit. Remember: You can always speak with a confidential counseling professional in your unit or on base, or with an off-base provider.



## **LGBTQ+ Military Kids and Schools**

Finding an affirming school can be one of the most stressful and difficult challenges that families of LGBTQ+ youth face. Frequent moves often leave our kids transitioning from one group of friends to another. Finding the right school can make a PCS more bearable for LGBTQ+ military kids.

As a parent, there are steps you can take to demand a safe, supportive environment for your child. Please refer to the Schools section of the Special Considerations for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth portion of this publication for more guidance.

Be your child's best and fiercest advocate. Do not accept harassment or mistreatment from anyone.



## **When It's Time to PCS: Navigating a Military Transition with an LGBTQ+ Child**

Moving every few years is tough enough for kids. But for LGBTQ+ kids, there are an entirely new set of challenges.

### **Prior to a PCS**

We all know that military moves are inevitable. Some service members have months to prepare, while others get surprise report dates just weeks away.

Moving an LGBTQ+ child requires consideration and planning—with whatever time you have.

As soon as you know where you're going, start finding resources for yourself and your child. Research schools and neighborhoods to ensure your child has the most affirming environment possible.

Learn about your location and protections (or lack thereof) for LGBTQ+ people, specifically LGBTQ+ children. You might not avoid discrimination, but you can prepare yourself for what you will encounter at your new location.

**“You are not alone. Use your voice to make sure your child receives the proper access to care. Don’t stay silent and in fear of how it will affect the service member, because you have a constitutional right to speak up! You will hear a lot of nos, but keep going until you hear the answer that is right for your child.”**

– Air Force Spouse, Mother to Four LGBTQ+ Kids



### **EFMP for Transgender and Gender Expansive Children**

If your child is transgender or nonbinary, they may qualify for an EFMP designation. EFMP offers some protection against orders where gender-affirming care is not available.

EFMP does not necessarily mean the service member’s orders will be changed or canceled. See the Special Considerations for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth section for more information about EFMP.

### **Finding Support for LGBTQ+ Military Kids**

Undoubtedly, one of the hardest parts of military life is leaving behind the people we’ve met along the way. Military kids will say goodbye to more friends before their 18th birthday than most people will in an entire lifetime.

Friendships are crucial for children, teens, and young adults, and nowhere is that more apparent in the LGBTQ+ community. Our children want to belong, and while we can’t force our kids to make friends, we can make the process easier.

Before moving, sit down with your child and explore your next location. Find clubs, sports, or other activities they might be interested in trying. Many cities have groups designed specifically for LGBTQ+ youth; consider connecting with them before you arrive to learn more about their programs.

It’s essential to establish healthcare in your new community. Which doctor will your child see? Is there an LGBTQ+ affirming medical clinic nearby? What about mental health counselors?

We recommend contacting the local PFLAG chapter at your next location or reaching out to PFLAG National to help connect with other PFLAG families in the area. They can offer support while also directing you to local resources for your child. Visit [pflag.org/findachapter](https://pflag.org/findachapter) to connect, or contact PFLAG National at [info@pflag.org](mailto:info@pflag.org).

### **At the New Location**

Once you've arrived, focus on creating a safe, stable environment for your LGBTQ+ child. Going to a new school can be stressful and scary. There is an added element of anxiety for LGBTQ+ children, teens, and young adults. By creating a loving and accepting home environment, you can give your LGBTQ+ kid a safe place to land after a rough day.

If your child does experience discrimination, don't brush it off. LGBTQ+ children who feel accepted at school are less likely to experience serious mental health issues. Therefore, it's vital to your child's mental and emotional health to be in a school where they feel safe. Talk to the administrators, teachers, and counselors and address any concerns you might have.



### **Special Considerations for Transgender and Nonbinary Youth**

Learning that a loved one is transgender or questioning their gender identity can be challenging to process. No matter how old your loved one is, you will likely face a range of emotions and have even more questions. This will undoubtedly be a turning point of sorts, not just in the life of your loved one, but in your life as well.

Parents and caregivers often experience an array of emotions. These might include:

- ♥ Fear for your loved one's safety.
- ♥ Guilt that something you did "caused" your child to be transgender.
- ♥ A sense of grief for the future you thought your child would have.
- ♥ Anxiety or embarrassment about how you and your loved one might be treated, viewed, and judged by others.



These emotions are all normal and valid. However, no matter what feelings you have, it's important to lead with love and support your transgender or nonbinary loved one. Family support is the most significant contributor to positive mental health for transgender individuals. Your love and acceptance could be lifesaving.

## **Where to Start**

Navigating through a loved one's transition can be difficult under the best of circumstances. Military families face an additional layer of complexity. If you recently learned that a loved one is transgender or nonbinary, educating yourself is the best way to support them.

First, we suggest downloading or purchasing the PFLAG publication *Our Trans Loved Ones*. We designed this publication, available in English and Spanish, to help parents, caregivers, and families understand what it means to be transgender or nonbinary. You'll learn important terminology, get answers to your most pressing questions, and learn how to support your loved one on this journey. You can access this publication at [pflag.org/ourtranslovedones](https://pflag.org/ourtranslovedones).

You likely have many questions regarding your child's gender identity, the next steps, and how to best support your child. There are many resources available to families and transgender individuals to help everyone navigate this transition. The list of resources continues to grow as transgender issues become more mainstream. You can visit the PFLAG National website at [pflag.org](https://pflag.org) for an updated list of educational resources.

Next, supporting your child is crucial. Ask your child which pronouns you should use, whether they want to go by another name, and how you can help them feel more comfortable and supported. It's okay to ask them questions about how and when they knew they were transgender. They might not feel comfortable discussing their gender identity with you, but let them know that you are willing to listen and learn, without judgment.

Even if you don't fully understand what it means to be transgender or nonbinary—or you have questions about your child's gender identity—showing love and support is imperative. Tell your child that you love them. Use the correct name and pronouns, even when your child isn't present. Thank your child for trusting you with this information. Start learning as much as you can about gender dysphoria, gender identity, gender expression, and transgender rights.

And we'll repeat it, because it is important: You should seek support for yourself. You are not alone, even though it may feel that way, especially at first. There are many military families with transgender and nonbinary loved ones. Think of your child's transition as an opportunity to create a new community of fellow parents, caregivers, and transgender individuals. No one needs to take this journey on their own.

**“PFLAG was instrumental in helping us when our daughter came out. They provided an incredible set of resources for us to learn and grow with her, as well as support in our local community that proved invaluable as we built a support network. I would highly recommend every military family reach out to PFLAG no matter where you are in your child’s journey.”**

– Active Duty Air Force Major, Parent to a Transgender Daughter



## **Transgender Kids and the Military**

Military families with transgender and nonbinary family members will likely face challenges. Most military families move frequently, having little say in where they will be stationed next. Some states and countries protect transgender people and their rights, but most do not. Consequently, families with transgender loved ones must constantly assess which duty stations offer appropriate support, medical care, and laws to best support their loved ones.

Families with transgender children are also at the mercy of federal laws and Department of Defense regulations. As we’ve seen in recent years, those regulations can change at a moment’s notice. Those changes can immediately impact our loved ones’ rights to proper medical care, the right to serve openly in military service, the right to participate safely in school and after-school activities, and the right to live free of discrimination, harassment, and harm.

## **Nonbinary Service Members and Dependents**

Nonbinary identities aren’t new, but society is only now embracing those who do not fall into the gender binary. The military is a very binary-centered institution. Think of all the “Yes sirs” and “Yes ma’ams” overheard on a daily basis. Even military clothing is gendered, leaving nonbinary service members unsure of their place.

The Modern Military Association of America (MMAA) is working with military and government leaders to make the military more inclusive for nonbinary service members and dependents. Organization leaders meet regularly with members



of Congress and the Department of Defense to educate leaders and encourage protections for all nonbinary military personnel.

## **Transgender Rights in America**

Transgender rights have been at the forefront of American media and policy for several years now. While the country has made strides towards equality and inclusion, there is much more work to do. In recent years, many states have introduced or passed legislation prohibiting transgender youth from receiving gender-affirming and appropriate medical care or from participating in school sports.

The military has also made some strides on LGBTQ+ issues—but there is a long way to go. LGBTQ+ service members could not serve openly until Congress repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell in 2011. Even then, service members only received protection based on sexual orientation, not on gender identity, leaving transgender and nonbinary service members in an unsure position regarding their military service.

In February 2017, the White House issued a statement barring transgender individuals from serving openly in the military. This regulation did not ban medical care for transgender service members or military dependents. Nevertheless, the statement brought further worry and confusion for many transgender service members and dependents.

In early 2021, the incoming administration in the White House overturned the transgender military ban. However, at the time of writing there are no national laws protecting transgender service members nor transgender military dependents from discrimination based on their gender identity. Therefore, military families with transgender loved ones fear another ban under future administrations unless Congress passes legislation explicitly protecting transgender people.

Unfortunately, these laws may continue to shift from one administration to the next. You can help protect your transgender loved one by staying up to date on the latest policies related to transgender rights.

## **Gender Dysphoria and Transgender Healthcare**

Some transgender and nonbinary people will experience gender dysphoria at some time in their lives. Gender dysphoria is the distress caused when a person's assigned sex at birth and assumed gender is not the same as the one with which they identify. This distress can be debilitating for some people and relatively mild for others.

In most cases, Tricare requires a gender dysphoria diagnosis from a medical professional before the patient can receive appropriate medical treatment. Current guidance requires evaluation by a "Tricare authorized mental health

provider”<sup>4</sup> who can confirm the diagnosis. Treatment for gender dysphoria might include mental health counseling (to relieve anxiety and distress related to the dysphoria); puberty blockers for children entering puberty; or hormone therapy for older teens or adults.

At the time of the writing of this publication, Tricare does not cover gender-affirming surgeries for dependents.

Not all military medical providers follow the internationally accepted standards of care for transgender patients. If your child’s doctor is not informed or willing to treat your child’s gender dysphoria, refer to the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (WPATH) Standards of Care.<sup>5</sup>

## **Mental Health Counseling**

An important note here: treatment for gender dysphoria typically includes mental health counseling. There is a misconception that being transgender is a mental health condition that must be “fixed.” This is a false and harmful misrepresentation. In truth, many transgender people do seek counseling. However, the support they seek is to help deal with the anxiety and depression they face from external circumstances regarding their gender identity. Those with supportive and affirming families, schools, and communities will likely face fewer mental health challenges.

Mental health professionals are not all created equal, especially when it comes to transgender-related counseling. Your loved one’s mental health therapist should be well versed in transgender issues, including gender dysphoria. Any therapist treating transgender clients should be familiar with the WPATH Standards of Care and the American Academy of Pediatrics. Both of these institutions fully support gender-affirming mental and medical healthcare for children, teens, and adults. It is important to note that the American College of Pediatrics is not an affirming or accredited organization, but one rooted in fringe beliefs, and unsound and harmful practices.

If Tricare doesn’t cover the mental health specialist your child needs, contact your local patient advocacy office to learn more about your options for coverage.

## **Challenges with Military Medical Facilities and Transgender Healthcare**

Military families of transgender and nonbinary youth face significant challenges in healthcare. Tricare insurance generally covers hormone therapy and psychological counseling for dependents diagnosed with gender dysphoria. However, receiving that diagnosis can prove difficult if your PCM or mental health provider is not gender affirming.

Frequent moves create another challenge. Gender identity medicine is a highly specialized field. Quite often, these clinics book appointments several weeks or

even months in advance. Moving to a new location not only means locating these specialty clinics but trying to get an appointment in a timely manner. For some transgender youth, a PCS might also mean temporarily losing access to vital medications or treatments. For others, a PCS means that a qualified specialist is hundreds of miles away.

Currently, there is no national law protecting a transgender person's right to healthcare and, in fact, some states have now passed laws limiting access to medically necessary, age-appropriate medical care for gender dysphoria. Military families who receive orders to one of these states can pursue an EFMP change of station or consider living apart to maintain gender-affirming healthcare for their child.

We will cover EFMP later in this booklet. You should know that gender dysphoria is a qualifying condition for EFMP enrollment. Your child has the right to easily accessible, medically necessary care.

## **Schools**

Schools are another area where military families with transgender and nonbinary children can face opposition. Without national legislation protecting transgender students, each state enacts its own laws regarding treatment, protections, and support for transgender students. Currently, several states have passed legislation making it harder for transgender children and teens to get healthcare, access bathrooms and locker rooms, and participate in youth sports.

Transgender youth who feel safe and supported at school are less likely to experience anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation. It is vital that your child's learning environment affirms their identity and respects their rights.

As a parent or caregiver, you are your child's greatest advocate. Before you PCS to a new location, research the state's statutes on LGBTQ+ rights, particularly regarding transgender youth. If the state has anti-discrimination laws in place, you can likely expect less pushback from your child's school. However, if the state has no legislation or, even worse, legislation denying transgender youth healthcare or forbidding transgender students from competing in a sport matching their gender identity, you can expect a more difficult road ahead.

Once you've done your research, contact the school and request a meeting with the administrator, your child's teacher or teachers, and the school counselor. During this meeting, you may wish to do the following:

- ♥ Introduce your family and your child, using the correct name and pronouns.
- ♥ Ask about LGBTQ+-affirming and gender-inclusive policies in the school and district.

- ♥ Insist that all teachers and staff use your child's correct name and pronouns. You may wish to reiterate statistics showing that these actions drastically reduce rates of depression and self-harm among transgender youth.
- ♥ Ask about bathroom and locker room policies. Know the state's laws: some schools may say they do not allow children to use facilities matching their gender identity. Most are required to either let your child use the bathroom of their choice or provide an alternative, gender-neutral option.
- ♥ If your child has not legally changed their name, insist the school change your child's name on all documents, computer systems, and IDs wherever possible.
- ♥ Ask about substitute teacher policies and how the teacher will protect your child from usage of their incorrect name.
- ♥ Suggest additional resources for the administrators and staff to review, such as PFLAG National's publication, *Cultivating Respect: Safe Schools for All*, available in English and Spanish at [pflag.org/safeschools](http://pflag.org/safeschools). This booklet provides actionable steps for parents, teachers, school staff, and students to make schools a safer space for all. Educational materials can help teachers and administrators learn more about what it means to be transgender, why it's vital to support transgender students, and how to be better allies to all LGBTQ+ people.
- ♥ If you're comfortable, consider making yourself available to answer questions about your experience. However, it is important that you are comfortable doing so and want to serve in this role; set boundaries for yourself before doing the emotional labor of educating others.
- ♥ Ask if the school has an LGBTQ+ student-led club, like a Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) club. If not, suggest starting one.

You might also discuss putting your child on a 504 plan or Individualized Education Plan (IEP) to ensure they receive gender-affirming treatment in the classroom. Another option is the Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP).

## **EFMP and Transgender Dependents**

The Exceptional Family Member Program (EFMP) provides military dependents with necessary care, support, and services based on identified medical, physical, or mental health needs. For many years, transgender dependents were not eligible for enrollment in EFMP, even though gender dysphoria is a diagnosable and medically recognized condition. Thanks to the advocacy and activism of military families and allies, transgender children and teens now qualify for EFMP enrollment. As such, military families with a transgender child can request orders only to locations where appropriate medical care is readily available.

The military cannot station EFMP dependents at installations that lack the necessary resources. For instance, the military wouldn't station families with

**“For me, being part of [PFLAG] has given me the opportunity to learn about the resources out there for our LGBTQ+ community/families. This also puts me in a position to be an even bigger advocate for our LGBTQ+ military families.”**

– Marine Corps Spouse, Parent of a Gay Son



a child who needs accessible housing at a base without ADA housing, or service members with dependents who need access to specialized medical care far away from necessary specialists.

In some cases, the service member may still be required to PCS to the new location, but EFMP dependents will not be on the orders. In these cases, the dependent (and usually the rest of the family) will live apart from the service member for the duration of the tour. Although not an ideal situation, the health and safety of your transgender child may require it.

EFMP enrollment can significantly narrow down your PCS options. However, enrollment protects your child from living in a location where transgender healthcare is either not available, not allowed under law, or inadequate. EFMP is just one way to protect your transgender child from living in potentially harmful environments.

You can also contact your installation’s School Liaison Officer (SLO). This person can help you navigate transferring documents from one school to another and assist you in accessing additional resources.

### **Living Overseas with a Transgender Child**

Living overseas can be an incredible experience for a military family. However, families with transgender children often face obstacles when seeking care at an overseas medical facility.

Transgender youth who are experiencing gender dysphoria often require age-appropriate medical intervention.

Current guidance requires government medical treatment facilities to provide age-appropriate care for transgender or nonbinary youth. As of this writing, the

Department of Defense requires Tricare to cover medically necessary transgender healthcare for dependents. However, as administrations change, so often do the policies regarding transgender healthcare.

Two main issues arise when seeking medical care for your transgender military child overseas.

First, many healthcare providers require a child or teen experiencing gender dysphoria to see a qualified mental health professional. Not all mental health professionals can adequately help a child navigate gender identity. Finding a mental health professional specializing in discussing gender identity and gender dysphoria is complicated enough in the United States. Finding a qualified therapist overseas can be nearly impossible.

Second, not all primary care managers (PCMs) receive training to provide treatment for gender dysphoria. Your child's PCM may not have access to the most updated information or treatment options. In some cases, providers outright refuse to treat transgender patients because of personal beliefs.

Unfortunately, military families living overseas typically have few options if their PCM refuses care. If you experience a refusal of care for your transgender child, you can try the following:

- ♥ **Ask for a PCM change.** Other providers in the same facility may be more equipped and willing to treat your child for gender dysphoria and other related medical care. You can also request to transfer your child's care to a PCM off base.
- ♥ **Insist on seeing a specialist.** In some instances, you might be stationed close to a medical facility with an adolescent medicine clinic and/or gender-affirming medical care. However, even if you get approval to see a specialist, you may need to travel long distances to receive care—often at your own expense.
- ♥ **Share WPATH information.** Refer the medical provider to internationally recognized standards of care by WPATH and the AAP.
- ♥ **Talk with the patient advocate at your installation's MTF.** This person can help you navigate any challenges with your child's medical care and help you find a solution.
- ♥ **As a last resort, you can request a temporary medical duty (TDY) to a specialist in the United States.** In some cases, you can also request an EFMP move, which will move the dependent to a location with appropriate medical care. The service member may have to remain at the current location for the remainder of the tour.



Thankfully, military physicians are increasingly aware of transgender issues, specifically for youth. Every year, more medical professionals become well versed in treatment options. Even if your PCM isn't able to provide care, you might have access to a nearby facility that can provide treatment.

## **Gender Markers on Military Documents**

In 2022, the military's healthcare management system changed, allowing dependents to note their gender identity on medical forms. The new system, MHS Genesis, now allows patients to mark their gender identity in addition to their sex assigned at birth. The hope is to reduce Tricare denials based on confusion over gender markers.

The new system will acknowledge and respect all patients' gender identities, as well as allow transgender youth to receive appropriate care without as many obstacles.

Leaders and military LGBTQ+ organizations are currently working with DoDEA to incorporate the same procedures in school documents.

## **Be Your Child's Biggest Advocate**

Military families are no strangers to advocacy and resiliency. As the parent of a transgender or nonbinary child, you must be your child's biggest supporter.

There may be times when military medical facilities either refuse to treat your child or do not have accurate information about transgender children, teens, or young adults. Remember, your child has a right to respectful, compassionate, culturally inclusive healthcare, no matter their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Should you encounter pushback from your medical providers, come prepared with knowledge and information. You might refer the provider to the WPATH or AAP Standards of Care, which unequivocally recommend age-appropriate gender-affirming care for children of all ages. Fight for the treatment your child requires.

Healthcare for transgender youth is quickly improving. However, access to high-quality adolescent medicine specialists remains limited. Many doctors lack the necessary training about transgender healthcare. Even if your child's doctor is willing to provide treatment, they might not have the knowledge and means to do so. You will likely need to spend many hours on the phone with Tricare, medical facilities, and clinics before you find the care your child needs.

Do not give up. Recent studies show that affirming healthcare drastically reduces depression and suicidal ideation rates for transgender children and teens.<sup>6</sup> Access to expert medical care can make all the difference in the life of your transgender military kid.

## Final Thoughts for Parents

Military families are no strangers to challenge. While learning that you have an LGBTQ+ child might feel like a hardship, it's actually a beautiful opportunity to connect as a family and grow closer. Your support and acceptance will make a world of difference in your child's life; lead with love and find the support that all of you need.

Remember, you are not alone in this journey. There are plenty of other families, just like yours, who are willing to connect with you and guide you along the way. Please reach out to any of the organizations or resources mentioned throughout this publication, and in the Resources section at the end of this guide.

The next section is for LGBTQ+ military kids and teens; please consider sharing this publication with your child.

We at PFLAG National thank you and your family for your service and recognize your sacrifices. We are honored to be a part of your family's story, and hope the information you've found here will be helpful in your journey.





# LGBTQ+ MILITARY KIDS:

## THIS IS FOR YOU

This section is all about you, the military kid who identifies as LGBTQ+.

If you're not out to your family and friends, this is for you.

If you're out, loud and proud, this is for you.

If you're still questioning and unsure where you fit in the LGBTQ+ community? Yes, this is for you, too.

There are some really cool parts about being a military brat, but let's face it: Being a military brat is hard. And not just because you're called "brats." (Who came up with that, anyway?) Military kids are experts at saying goodbye and starting over. Moving across the country. Moving to the other side of the world. Saying goodbye to friends and teachers. Saying goodbye to places they learned to call home. Saying goodbye to parents who deploy.

All of these things are challenging. Being a military brat who is part of the LGBTQ+ community can make it feel even more difficult.

### **You Are Not Alone**

Being a military kid sometimes feels lonely. And being an LGBTQ+ person can feel lonely at times, too. But even when life gets tough—when your parent deploys for the umpteenth time, or you get orders to move yet again—remember that you are not alone.

There are thousands of other people, just like you, who understand what you're going through. Believe it or not, there are people at your school and in your community like you, too. Later in this section, we will give you some tips to help you connect with other LGBTQ+ people from military families, both online and in person.

We know that each experience is different. Each person is different. You might come from a supportive home. You might come from a home that doesn't accept

your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. You might be out to your family, or you might be afraid to let them know who you really are.

There isn't a "right way" or a "wrong way" to navigate this path. Connecting with others can help you process your own thoughts and feelings, but ultimately, this is your life. You get to decide how to live it.

## **Be Yourself**

Everyone deserves to be accepted and loved for who they are, inclusive of their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. You are unique and special, and you deserve respect and kindness from others.

You deserve respect at school. You deserve kindness among people in the military community. You deserve to be safe wherever you travel in the world. You deserve support from friends and family. Most of all, you deserve love, kindness, and respect.

To help get you started, check out Be Yourself, a PFLAG National publication designed to answer your questions about being an LGBTQ+ or questioning person. Be Yourself can help answer sensitive questions about sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, mental health, and coming out. It's an excellent resource for all LGBTQ+ youth and is available for free online at [pflag.org/beyourself](https://pflag.org/beyourself).



## **Coming Out**

First things first: your story is your own. You get to choose whom you share it with and when to share it—or if you share it at all.

Your sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression don't define who you are as a person. They are only one part of what makes you unique and special. Whether or not you choose to reveal those parts of yourself is entirely up to you.

## **How Do I Know if I'm LGBTQ+?**

There's no easy answer to this question. You'll know when you know.

It's okay if you're not completely sure. It's also okay if you have known definitively for years. There is no timeline, so don't worry if you don't have it all figured out just yet.

You don't have to know anything definitively before you choose to come out to friends or family. On the other hand, even if you are completely sure of your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, you still don't have to tell anyone unless you want to.

## **Should I Come Out to My Parent(s)?**

Before coming out to your parent(s) or guardian(s), ask yourself a few questions:

**“You never know what’s gonna happen.  
But be with [your kids] so you can  
support them when they fall.”**

– Air Force Kid, Transgender



- ♥ **Are your parent(s) or guardian(s) generally accepting of LGBTQ+ people?** When they see a same-sex couple on a TV show or hear a news story about transgender rights, what is their reaction? If you don’t know for sure, you can casually bring up LGBTQ+ issues in conversation when it’s natural and see how they react.
- ♥ **What is your relationship like with your parents overall?** Have they demonstrated unconditional love for you? Do you feel like they will love you no matter who you are or what you say?
- ♥ **Do you have safe, reliable options if they don’t respond well?** Do you have a safe place to stay if need be, a person to call for support, or a plan to support yourself financially?

If your parents generally accept LGBTQ+ people in their own lives (or even in the media) and they have proven they will accept you no matter what, there’s a good chance they will accept you after you come out, too.

If you read the bullet points above and are even more anxious about coming out to your parent(s) or guardian(s), pay attention to that intuition. Not all parents will be accepting, so you need to weigh your options carefully.

Coming out to a parent can be scary. Children of military members face additional uncertainty because they often live far away from other family members and friends who could support them if something goes awry.

Put your safety and mental health first. Some LGBTQ+ people decide that the stress and loneliness of hiding their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression are greater than the risks of coming out. Others prioritize their physical safety and mental well-being by not coming out. In the end, only you can decide whether to come out, when, and to whom.

## **Military Communities and Acceptance of LGBTQ+ People**

Up until about a decade ago, lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) service members could not serve openly in the military. Many were outed and forced out of the service.

Since 2011, LGB service members can openly serve, but there is still wariness around the issue. In addition, for transgender and nonbinary people, things are even more challenging. In 2017, the White House issued a statement saying transgender people could not join the military. In 2021, a new administration in the White House reversed that policy; however many LGBTQ+ people within the military community remain unsure about their future.

The politics surrounding the military and LGBTQ+ rights might lead you to believe that your military family member(s)—or the military community as a whole—are generally less accepting; that's not the case.

Military communities are similar to any other community in America, with conservative families and liberal families; families with very strong religious beliefs and those who do not attend faith services; and families with married parents, divorced parents, single parents, and absent parents.

In the same way, military families will all react differently to hearing that their child is LGBTQ+. There is no evidence that military families are more or less prone to accepting a child based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Some in the military community will be supportive, and others might not. You may have just as many issues in a Department of Defense school as you would in an off-base public school. There will be challenges in the military community and in the civilian community.

Remember that wherever you find yourself there will be wonderful, accepting, loving people ready to support you, military or otherwise.

## **Coming Out to Others**

Just as with coming out to your parent(s) or guardian(s), there is a lot to consider before coming out to friends, teachers, community members, or other family members. You will have to weigh the risks and benefits and determine whom you can trust with this new information about yourself.

Sometimes, it's best to come out to a close friend before telling your parents. Finding a support system is incredibly important for all LGBTQ+ people. If you have a friend whom you know to be an LGBTQ+ ally, you might consider confiding in them first. They can often help you organize your thoughts and offer suggestions about how and when to tell your family.

Many children of military members connect with others online. For some, technology is the only way to communicate with friends made along the way

because chances are that either one or both might have moved away from each other. In some ways, this makes it easier to come out to a friend. Telling someone online feels less scary. You might consider telling a trusted friend you communicate with online.

Again, whom you choose to tell—and what you choose to tell them—is entirely up to you. Your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression doesn't define you. Still, it is a big piece of who you are. Hiding that can begin to feel heavy and overwhelming. Sometimes, coming out can make you feel like a weight has been lifted.

Coming out to even one person means you can begin to live more authentically and embrace all of who you are. It's also a way to start forming the support system you can rely on when life gets difficult. There's nothing quite like having someone in your corner who truly knows you and supports you exactly as you are.



## **What if My Parents Aren't Supportive?**

Unfortunately, there are instances where parents aren't supportive of their LGBTQ+ kids.

While it's sometimes difficult to know how your parent(s) might react in the moment, you can look at their beliefs, comments, and behaviors for clues about how they will respond. If they are generally accepting of LGBTQ+ people in the media, in their friend groups, or in the military service, they are more likely to be accepting of you if you do decide to tell them.

However, if your parent(s) are openly hostile towards LGBTQ+ people, or make hateful or hurtful comments, you are right to be more wary of coming out to them. If you choose to come out to them, make sure you have a plan in place if they aren't supportive. Have a network of support established before you come out to your parent(s) if you are worried they might not be supportive.

## **Start with Education**

Often, people who aren't supportive of LGBTQ+ people, or are openly hostile, are misinformed. Their fear, misunderstanding, and disapproval come from a place of ignorance or deeply held beliefs that they have carried for years. In short, they don't know any better.

While ignorance is no excuse for mistreatment, it can explain why such mistreatment happens. It's not your responsibility to educate others about LGBTQ+ issues. Still, the more knowledge you have, the more you can educate your family members who might not understand.

**“I get to be myself. And I get to brag that I’m unique.”**

– Air Force Kid, Transgender, on her favorite part of being in the LGBTQ+ community.



We wrote the first part of this publication specifically for military parents of LGBTQ+ kids. If you haven’t already, consider sharing this publication with your parent(s).

You can also direct your family members and friends to the PFLAG National website at [pflag.org](http://pflag.org). Many resources are available there, including publications specifically for parents of LGBTQ+ kids, information on local chapters for in-person and virtual support meetings, and more. If your parent(s) are open to learning more about the LGBTQ+ community, you might suggest that they attend a PFLAG meeting.

### **Give Your Parents Some Time and Space**

It’s not uncommon for parents to feel surprised when their child comes out.

In military communities, thoughts often turn to “how will this impact our family?” Your military parent(s) might worry what others in their unit will think. If you are coming out as transgender or nonbinary, your parent(s) might be concerned about whether you’ll have access to the care you will need. The military community is like an extension of your family. In some cases, your coming out means your parent(s) will have to go through a coming-out process of sorts, too.

Most often, parents worry about the safety of their LGBTQ+ kids. There is no denying that being part of this community sometimes means a higher risk of discrimination and mistreatment. Your parent(s) are probably worried about what might happen to you in the future.

If your parents aren’t on board right away—that is, they aren’t harsh, but they just don’t “get it”—give them time. You are further along this road than they are. You have known about your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression for a while. They are just finding out. For some parents, it will take time to learn and adjust to this news.

Your family might want to talk about your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. They might have many questions about what it means. Encourage them to read reliable information or contact a local affirming support group.



While we encourage you to be patient with them, you do not need to do that in any way that affects your wellbeing or creates a delay in your journey. PFLAG is here to support your parents so they can focus on your needs and feelings; your best interests are our highest priority.

## When Parents Aren't Supportive

We can't promise that your parent(s) will come around; some might never be fully accepting. There are families, unfortunately, who will never accept their LGBTQ+ children. Sometimes, these families never heal.

If your parents aren't affirming or accepting of your sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression, remember that you have done nothing wrong. There is never any excuse for emotional, psychological, or physical abuse. If you are experiencing abuse at home, get help. Tell a trusted adult, teacher, or counselor, or utilize one of the immediate support networks listed in the back of this publication, or at [pflag.org/hotlines](http://pflag.org/hotlines).

Depending on your age, you might still have a while until you can leave home. In a military community, leaving can be even more difficult, especially if stationed in another country or a location far away from accepting family members and friends.

There are ways to protect your mental and emotional health while living in a non-supportive environment:

- ♥ **Build a support network.** Find friends who accept you for who you are. Join LGBTQ+ clubs at school, chat with affirming people in a safe online environment, or join online forums designed for LGBTQ+ youth and/or military kids. Visit the Resources section at the back of this publication for suggestions.
- ♥ **Find healthy ways to stay busy.** If you're in an unaccepting or abusive home, the best thing you can do is find safe, healthy activities outside of your home to keep you busy. Try after-school clubs or sports. If you have access to a military base, check out their youth center, fitness center, or library. Many military installations have programs for youth. Keep your days full—and fill them with things and people that make you feel good about yourself.
- ♥ **Talk to a trusted person.** Hopefully you have a trusted friend to talk to when you're struggling. But if you find yourself needing support, and you don't have anywhere else to turn, try talking to a school counselor, the on-base youth Military Family Life Counselor (MFLC), a chaplain (if from an affirming denomination), or an online friend or peer. You are never alone. There are always people ready to listen and help you through a tough time.
- ♥ **Check your mental health.** It's not uncommon for LGBTQ+ people to feel down, depressed, or hopeless, especially if they don't have a supportive home environment. It is okay to not be okay. If you have thoughts of hurting yourself or someone else, or you need immediate mental health or medical support,

please don't wait. Contact a trusted friend or family member or connect with one of the crisis resources listed in the inside cover of this publication, or at [pflag.org/hotlines](http://pflag.org/hotlines).

You matter. You are important. There are many people—including PFLAG members across the country and around the world—who are here for you.



## **Starting Over Again: Moving as an LGBTQ+ Military Kid**

Military families are experts at saying goodbye. They're resilient. They're strong. And they are used to change.

As a member of the LGBTQ+ community AND a military kid, you might have some strong emotions about moving...again. It's common and perfectly acceptable to feel sad, angry, hopeful, brave, overwhelmed, or any one of dozens of emotions, even all at once.

Moving to a new place can be an exciting change of pace. But there's no getting around it: for some it can be intimidating walking into a new school, in a new city, with all new people.

Moving is challenging for many military kids. For young members of the LGBTQ+ community, frequent military moves come with unique challenges. You might not have any choice in where your family ends up. You could end up somewhere awesome, or you could end up somewhere...well, not as awesome.

### **LGBTQ+ Rights at Your New Location**

Not all states and countries protect LGBTQ+ people from discrimination. Before your family moves, find out what laws are on the books to protect you and your family.

Recently, some states have introduced legislation that makes life more difficult for LGBTQ+ youth. Some schools are removing literature featuring LGBTQ+ characters or themes. Other states have laws that make it much harder for transgender youth to receive gender-affirming medical care. Some states have also enacted laws preventing transgender students from playing on sports teams or using facilities that match their gender identity or gender expression.

Some military bases, especially those overseas, don't offer many options for schools or doctors. There are currently rules to protect LGBTQ+ students on military bases from discrimination based on their sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. Still, these policies can change with each incoming administration.

Many LGBTQ+ organizations—including PFLAG National—are working hard to protect young people just like you, as are many parents, families, and allies. The



best thing you can do is to educate yourself about the laws in your new location and be your own best ally when you feel you're being mistreated. If you have supportive parents, encourage them to contact their representatives and fight for equal protections. If you're of voting age, register to vote, call and write your representatives if you're comfortable doing so, and vote in local and national elections.

## Make It a Smooth Move

The orders are cut, the moving truck is scheduled, and you've already started your goodbyes. Whether you're thrilled to be moving or sad to leave this base behind (or a little of both), there are a few ways to make this move a little smoother:

- ♥ **Be proactive.** Learn about your new base, new school, and new neighborhood. Do you already know people there? How can you meet people with common interests?
- ♥ **Look up the school you'll be attending, if you know.** Are there clubs, sports, or other activities that interest you? Does the school have an LGBTQ+ organization like a Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA)?
- ♥ **Do some research about your new location.** What are you excited to see? Where would you like to explore? Find some local parks, attractions, or activities that you might want to try.
- ♥ **Reach out to a trusted friend or a supportive family member or counselor** for help when you need it.
- ♥ **Take care of your mental and physical health** before, during, and after the move.
- ♥ **Find ways to keep in touch with friends** at your current location.
- ♥ **You don't have to come out to people at your new location right away—or ever.** You own your story; share it only if and when you're ready.

## A Chance to Reinvent Yourself

It can be tough to leave family and friends behind when you move to a new location. However, it's also a chance for a fresh start. You can reinvent yourself, and decide who you're going to be and what you're going to do in this next chapter.

You might know a few people at your new location, but more than likely, you're starting from scratch. Sure, that means having to decide when or whether to come out, and to whom. But it's also a chance to expand your support network and add more people to your circle of friends.

Each move is an opportunity for new experiences, new friendships, and a deeper understanding of yourself. And when you're feeling nostalgic, your old friends will be just a few keystrokes away.

# MILITARY FAMILIES:

## SHARING OUR PERSONAL STORIES

### One Military Family Fighting for Transgender Rights: Jessica's Story

Jessica Girven sat in a medical treatment facility at Ramstein Air Base, Germany. Her daughter, Blue, then 11, came out as transgender just months earlier. It was the fall of 2016 and the U.S. Department of Defense had just issued a policy directing Tricare to cover treatment for gender dysphoria, including counseling and hormone therapy.

Blue's coming out wasn't exactly a surprise.

"Blue had been telling us since she was two, 'When I grow up, I'm gonna be a girl,'" says Jessica. But it wasn't until 2016 that everything clicked. "One night, Blue got a hold of RuPaul's Drag Race and watched an entire season. She looked at me like this lightbulb went off. She turned to me and said, 'You can do that? You can become a girl?'"

Shortly after, on a family vacation, Blue borrowed a dress from a family friend. "She was glowing," Jessica states. "This child was finally happy for the first day in her entire life." It was the missing piece to Blue's puzzle.

Elated by the DoD's policy, which requires Tricare to treat patients with gender dysphoria, Jessica made an appointment with Blue's doctor, hoping to start age-appropriate medical intervention. Blue wasn't new to the facility; she had been a patient for seven years. The first visit after Blue came out went smoothly. However, during this, their second visit, doctors told Jessica they could no longer treat her child at the clinic. Blue would have to find another provider, at another clinic, in a country where American medical facilities are extremely limited.

The family found one doctor who would treat Blue—and only one—at another American base. Despite the updated guidance, that doctor would not treat Blue for gender dysphoria. There would be no gender-affirming care of any kind, including time-sensitive puberty blockers.

This interaction was only another obstacle the family's quest for equal treatment. Since the very beginning, Jessica and her husband, an active duty Airman, ran into one challenge after another.

Months before the medical facility refused to treat Blue, Jessica sat down with Blue's school administrators to tell them about her daughter's transition. The school was initially affirming, even creating a plan to ensure students and staff used correct pronouns. That plan also included letting Blue use the girls' bathroom. Then, the district's Superintendent suddenly reversed the decision, saying Blue had to either use the boys' bathroom or a single-stall, gender-neutral bathroom across campus.

"To go to the bathroom, she had to walk down three flights of stairs, across the courtyard, and go into another bathroom that was down the hall of another building," says Jessica. "Her hospital had cut her off from healthcare. Her school cut her off from bathrooms. I was furious."

Jessica, committed to protecting her child from discrimination and unequal treatment, posted about the family's experience on social media. The post drew the attention of many well-connected readers, and within 24 hours, it had reached the White House. Soon after, government officials released a policy demanding that students in DoD schools be allowed to use bathrooms and locker rooms corresponding to their gender identity.

Their fight over DoD school bathrooms had made national news. The story prompted policy change — and brought attention in the form of threats, judgment, and rage from around the world.

"We had death threats. Her school started this secret Facebook group bashing us. It was the teachers, the staff, families, bashing us for a year," says Jessica.

In the midst of questioning whether she had done the right thing by making Blue's story so public, Jessica received an email from a fellow military family who was also stationed overseas. Their transgender son was in a mental health facility, having attempted suicide for the third time. "He basically had told his parents, 'I'm done. There's no point.' And they came home and saw in the news that the policy [on trans youth in DoD schools] had changed," Jessica says.



**"Blue had been telling us since she was two, 'When I grow up, I'm gonna be a girl,'" says Jessica. But it wasn't until 2016 that everything clicked.**

The parents drove to the hospital to tell their son that he could go to school. The school had to let him in. “And he had hope. The family was so grateful,” Jessica continues.

“I had no idea that it would affect anyone else. But that’s when I realized it was bigger than us. That we weren’t alone. There are other families out there.”

Unfortunately, that hope was short-lived. Several months after instituting the policy allowing transgender students to use the bathrooms and locker rooms of their choice, a new administration overturned the rule. Military schools reverted to their old policies, leaving Blue—and children like her—confused, scared, and anxious.

As the months wore on, Blue’s gender dysphoria worsened, and she became increasingly depressed and anxious. Her body began to change, a constant reminder that her gender identity did not match her external body. Jessica says Blue became suicidal, but she could still not receive gender-affirming care at the military facilities in Germany.

Desperate to get her child help, Jessica reached out to several online forums and happened to connect with another military family with a transgender child. The family told Jessica about a military doctor on the East Coast who actively advocated for transgender kids. Jessica contacted the doctor, who had an appointment available just nine days later.

But the military refused to pay for Blue and her mom to fly to see the doctor.

“It was this sense of urgency to protect Blue, to keep Blue alive. I’ve never felt that, and I hope I never feel that again. It was almost panic,” Jessica says. “I said, ‘I don’t know how I’m gonna do it, but I’ll see you in nine days.’”

Blue’s family set up a crowdfunding page to help offset the cost of the trip. It was fully funded within five hours. “Our friends stepped in when the military failed us,” says Jessica. “Our friends came in and said, ‘no, we’re going to fight for her.’”

During their trip to the East Coast, Blue and Jessica went to Washington, D.C. to meet with several members of Congress. While Jessica and Blue were touring the Capitol, the White House announced the Transgender Military Ban via social media. Jessica was crushed. But she and Blue decided to use their voices to help fight the injustice. Blue even ended up on the House Floor and met with members of the House Armed Services Committee. There, Senator Joe Kennedy III brought Blue in front of the panel, telling the members “If you take away transgender service members’ rights, you will be taking away her rights too. So you will damn well look her in the eye first.”

That week, Jessica and a fellow military spouse and parent of an LGBTQ+ kid started a nonprofit organization, MilPride, to help pave the way for other military families with LGBTQ+ children. “I get support from the organization I started,”

Jessica says. “From other families. When Blue started [her transition], I was alone. We didn’t know anybody.”

Through their journey, Blue and her family have advocated for change, both in Washington and in their communities. “Your civil rights shouldn’t depend on your zip code, especially when you don’t choose your zip code,” Jessica says. “And to have to serve an organization that won’t protect our children...that is heartbreaking.”

Eventually, the lack of affirming healthcare in Germany proved too much. Blue became the first Air Force dependent to receive an EFMP designation for gender dysphoria, and her family moved back to the United States where she now has better access to care.

Today, Jessica continues to advocate for Blue and fight for equal rights for military transgender kids. Her advice for parents of transgender kids? “You’re going to hear a lot of ‘no.’ And that ‘no’ is based on ignorance. Educate yourself, because you are going to have to educate your doctor. You’re going to have to educate your school, your nurses, your teachers. And don’t take no for an answer, because your kid deserves it.”

Blue is now a thriving, happy, healthy teenage girl. She’s proud of what she and her family have accomplished together.

“I’ve helped a lot of people, which makes me happy,” say Blue. “I helped people without even doing anything. Just by being me. Just by existing.”

Blue continues, “I probably wouldn’t be here today if [my mom] hadn’t been supportive. At one point in my life, I was actually suicidal. I’m glad I have an affirming family.”



## **Coming Out as a Military Kid: Enrique’s Story**

Twenty-year-old Enrique Castro is intelligent, outgoing, and, like most military kids, used to going with the flow. As the son of a Marine, Enrique grew up in the vagabond lifestyle typical of military families. He’s lived all over the world, from the Dominican Republic to Japan. He’s made friends quickly and said goodbye to them just as fast.

Enrique is also one of the many military kids who identify as LGBTQ+.

By the time he was in fifth or sixth grade, he knew he liked boys. And though he knew his parents loved him, he wasn’t sure how they would feel about his being gay.

“Societal expectations of Americans is you get a girlfriend, you graduate with your four-year degree, get married, buy a house, get a job, have kids,” he says. “For



both my parents, a large and connected family that is integrated in community, that is where my parents come from. So, [their] desire is to see that continuing in perpetuity.”

His mom talked about grandkids. His extended family asked Enrique whether he liked any girls at school. These messages, though well intentioned, affected him.

“I don’t think it was done with the intent to pressure me to do anything. But I do know that it influenced the way I looked at myself.”

As a military kid—the son of a Marine at that—Enrique was also keenly aware that his coming out could potentially have consequences for his entire family.

“Military kids are always aware of how their actions can either directly or indirectly influence their mother or father’s relationship with commands. And I know my parents would never say that to me or to my brother. But the reality of the matter is the actions of the kids can have influence.”

And family is everything to a military kid.

“Being a military kid, you don’t have friends,” Enrique says, talking about the lack of stability and continuity in military life. “We don’t get friends. We don’t get community. We don’t get support. It is only the nuclear family. That’s who we travel with. That’s what we live and die by.

And because of that, those relationships with our parents, it becomes important to protect them, to make sure that they’re stable.”

The fear of potentially disrupting that crucial relationship with parents and siblings, says Enrique, is what prevents so many LGBTQ+ military kids from coming out.

“Imagine the kid stationed in Germany,” Enrique says, “and they come out to their parents, and their parents don’t accept them. Who do they go to? They have no extended family connections because they’ve grown up away from their family. What about college? What about a car? What about jobs? What about mentorship? What about emotional support? All of that goes up the minute that the military kid’s relationship with their parents becomes destroyed or becomes hard to work with.”

Thankfully, Enrique knew his parents loved him deeply. He came out to them in middle school, first telling his dad and then his mom.

“There were a lot of tears,” he says. “I said, ‘I didn’t know if you would be okay. I didn’t want to disappoint you.’”

His parents were immediately supportive. “If I knew I had my parents’ support the way that I have it now, I probably would’ve told them in like fourth grade,” he laughs.



But even after telling his parents, Enrique continued to struggle with his sexuality because he didn't see himself represented in what he saw in the media.

"I really didn't feel like I belonged to like the category of 'gay' because my perception of the LGBTQ community was one of popular culture. And so, I didn't see myself in that community.

There was no one in that community for me to resonate with because most of the time [I saw] drag queens or pop icons or rock stars.

"There was no humility represented in the larger community. It's hard to find the quiet professional who just so happens to be gay. Coming to terms with that, understanding that I can be gay, without needing to emulate what I see in popular culture, has been a process," says Enrique. "Ultimately, it's built better self-respect because I can define who I want to be without needing movies and TV shows to help me figure myself out."

It wasn't until the family moved to the Dominican Republic that Enrique found gay role models that resonated with him. There, Enrique and his family met US Ambassador to the Dominican Republic James Wally Brewster and his husband, Bob Satawake.

"That was when I was introduced to what a mature, stable, healthy, homosexual relationship looked like," says Enrique. "And I hadn't figured myself out quite yet, but I saw what they were, and I saw my parents being okay with that."

Later, Enrique moved to Okinawa, Japan, with his family. He attended a DoDEA high school, where other military kids were extremely accepting of his sexuality.

"It's full of military kids. We were all the new kids. There are no cliques. We've all had to put on different faces and become different people each time we move in order to survive....It was a weight off of my shoulders not having to worry about people choosing their established friendships over me. You don't have to work over the obstacle of history."

Enrique came out to his classmates his sophomore year. What he loves about his high school experience, he says, is that he wasn't simply known as "the gay kid."

"I was known as the smart kid on campus. It didn't define me, but everyone knew I was gay. And no one disliked me for being so."

According to Enrique, there was only one big drawback about being in a small military school on a Marine base. "The dating community is much harder to find. Being able to explore a romantic relationship. Having someone ask me out,



**Family is  
everything to  
a military kid.**

getting picked up to go on a date, or picking someone else to go on a date. Going to some of their basketball games. I didn't get that."

He also recognizes the vital role of his supportive family and acknowledges that other military kids might not have the same experience.

"Kids who grew up in [less supportive environments] will always struggle to reconcile where they come from with who they are. And that's a journey that they will take on their own. It might be easy for them, or it might be hard. But ultimately, it's going to be completely unique from what anyone else will ever do."

Today, Enrique is studying for college degrees in computer science, mathematics, and philosophy. He joined a fraternity that accepts him for who he is., has a serious boyfriend, and is still very close to his family.

Enrique remains defined not by his sexual orientation, but by who he is as a whole person.

"Other people remember me because of my ability to be a great speaker, my ability to be quick on my feet, my ability to take leadership, my ability to take initiative, and my character. So, for them, Enrique being gay is an afterthought. For me, being gay obviously has affected my life in so many ways, but it doesn't define my character. I know who I am. I don't need to prove myself to anyone because I know who I am, and I know my worth."



## **A Marine Spouse's Journey to Acceptance and Advocacy: Elizabeth's Story**

Elizabeth Castro is a Marine Corps spouse and has worked as an educator for 27 years, cultivating her passion for supporting military families. She and her husband, a master gunnery sergeant and veteran for the past 22 years, are parents of two sons, one of whom came out to them several years ago.

The Castros' journey began when their son, Enrique, was still in middle school. "He actually came out to his dad first," she says. "[Enrique] said he didn't want to break my heart. He said, 'I know you want grandbabies, and I don't know if that's possible if I'm gay.'"

Her son's concern made Elizabeth realize that her comments throughout the years inadvertently caused her son to hide his true self from his family.

"What we say and what we put out there, our kids internalize that. You think it's an innocent comment, which it is, but if you have a child who's gay, bi, or trans, or not sure how they're feeling. By saying that, then you've automatically put a wall up without realizing it."

The Castros have always been a close-knit family. Like most military families, they have lived away from immediate relatives nearly their entire military career, overcoming obstacles along the way. As a former educator, Elizabeth knew that stability would be important for her children, but the military lifestyle makes consistency difficult.

Determined to create that consistency wherever they could, the Castros developed family traditions with their sons. They instituted family reading nights and book clubs, joined Jiu-Jitsu, and started feeding displaced Marines over Thanksgiving as a family.

It's these traditions, says Elizabeth, that solidified their family bond and made Enrique feel safe enough to share his truth eventually.

"He said, 'Mom, I have something to tell you. I'm gay.'" Elizabeth told her son, "You need to know that I love you no matter what. This doesn't change my love for you. But I do have questions."

So, mother and son began a dialogue. It continues to this day.

"For the first year or so, he didn't want anybody to know. And we respected that. We didn't say anything until he said, 'Yeah, you can tell the family.'"

She wasn't sure how their large, Latino Catholic family would respond. "We told him, 'If anybody in the family has an issue with it or says anything, your father and I will handle it. You don't need to worry about that.' And so, he knew that he had our support. We had his back. We were there to protect him, and we were going to handle the family if there were any issues. And I think that gave Enrique the courage. Because it does take a lot of courage just to be yourself."

One by one, they told the family. Everyone was accepting from the start.

But not every military kid is so lucky. "We have to be able to show [our son] that we have his back, no matter what. He needs to know that explicitly so that he can be free to be who he wants," says Elizabeth. "A lot of kids don't have that. They won't come out because they're afraid of their parents."

When the family moved to Okinawa, Japan, they faced new challenges. Enrique, now a student at a DoDEA high school, found himself one of only a few openly-LGBTQ+ students.

Elizabeth understood the schools' critical role in a child's mental and emotional development. Her son's school was generally safe and accepting, but very few programs were available or explicitly designed for LGBTQ+ military-dependent students.

"The people were very kind and nice, but there wasn't a whole lot of LGBTQ representation there," she says.

"I think representation matters.



**“My goal [in joining PFLAG] was to educate myself and be in a position to advocate, not just for my child, but everybody’s child.”**

And when [LGBTQ+ kids] don’t see themselves in their community, they think, ‘Who do I identify with? Is there something wrong with me?’”

When the family moved back from Japan, Elizabeth jumped into action, determined to change the culture for LGBTQ+ military kids. She continues to advocate for better diversity, equity, and inclusion training for teachers, administrators, and staff in DoDEA and other military youth programs. Elizabeth also serves on the PFLAG National Board, informing policy decisions that impact military families worldwide.

“My goal [in joining PFLAG] was to educate myself and be in a position to advocate, not just for my child, but everybody’s child. I’ve learned so much. They’re very welcoming, a very no-judgment, safe space. I feel like I can be myself. I’m not perfect. I’ve never had a gay child before. I’m learning,” Elizabeth says. “I learned to ask questions, research, and say I am sorry a lot. I am grateful our son is patient with us.”

As a mom and an educator, Elizabeth says her passion is helping LGBTQ+ military kids feel safe and seen in school environments. “[Representation] is so important for the emotional and mental health of any child, not just the LGBTQ child,” says Elizabeth. “When kids go to school, they’re there eight-plus hours a day. Schools play such a huge influence. And with so much instability that a military family has, the school should be a safe place.”

Parents, says Elizabeth, need to be the fiercest advocates for their LGBTQ+ children. At overseas locations, parents can connect with the DoDEA administrators and headquarters to address the needs of the LGBTQ+ community. “Who knows their child better than a parent? School administrators listen to what parents have to say,” she says. “But I always say if you have a complaint, you need to have a suggestion to go along with it.”

As for advocating stateside? “Get involved with the school board,” she says emphatically. “Reach out to school leadership and find out if there’s something in place for these kids. If not, what can be done? How can a club get started at a school? What resources are there on the school district website for LGBTQ+ families?”

And no matter where you’re stationed, she says, write your representatives and demand equal treatment for our kids.

“All any mother wants, whether their child is gay or trans or not, is for them to be safe, for them to be happy, and for them to be healthy. That’s it; that’s what every parent wants. And being part of PFLAG makes sure that, when [my son] leaves my house and goes out to make his way in the world, it is a safe place. That he’s afforded all the same rights and opportunity as any other human being.”

# RESOURCES

## **GLSEN**

**[glsen.org](https://www.glsen.org) | (212) 727-0135 | [info@glsen.org](mailto:info@glsen.org)**

GLSEN works to ensure that LGBTQ students are able to learn and grow in a school environment free from bullying and harassment, and to transform K–12 schools in the U.S. into the safe and affirming environment all youth deserve.

## **GSA Network**

**[gsanetwork.org](https://www.gsanetwork.org) | (415) 552-4229 | [info@gsanetwork.org](mailto:info@gsanetwork.org)**

GSA Network is a next-generation LGBTQ racial and gender justice organization that empowers and trains queer, trans and allied youth leaders to advocate, organize, and mobilize an intersectional movement for safer schools and healthier communities.

## **Military Kids Connect**

**[militarykidsconnect.health.mil](https://militarykidsconnect.health.mil) | [militarykidsconnect.health.mil/Contact-Us](https://militarykidsconnect.health.mil/Contact-Us)**

Military Kids Connect is an online community for military children ages 6–17, and provides access to age-appropriate resources to support children dealing with the unique psychological challenges of military life. MKC offers informative activities, helpful videos, and an online community that can build and reinforce understanding, resilience, and coping skills in military children and their peers.

## **MilPride**

**[modernmilitary.org/portfolio-items/milpride](https://modernmilitary.org/portfolio-items/milpride) | (202) 328.3244 | [info@modernmilitary.org](mailto:info@modernmilitary.org)**

MilPride is a program of MMAA (see below) dedicated to military families with LGBTQ youth. Led by two military spouses who are mothers of transgender youth (including Jess Girven, whose story we feature in the Personal Stories section of this publication), MilPride is committed to ensuring no matter where you are stationed, you and your family never feel alone.



## **Modern Military Association of America (MMAA)**

**modernmilitary.org | (202) 328.3244 | info@modernmilitary.org**

The Modern Military Association of America (MMAA) is the nation's largest organization of LGBTQ service members, military spouses, veterans, their families and allies. Formed through the merger of the American Military Partner Association and OutServe-SLDN, they are a united voice for the LGBTQ military and veteran community. MMAA is working to make a real difference in the lives of military families through education, advocacy and support, and also provides free, direct legal services for the LGBTQ and HIV+ military and veteran communities.

## **PFLAG National**

**pflag.org | (202) 467-8180 | info@pflag.org**

PFLAG is an organization of LGBTQ+ people, parents, families, and allies who work together to create an equitable and inclusive world. We are hundreds of thousands of people and hundreds of chapters from coast to coast who are leading with love to support families, educate allies, and advocate for just, equitable, and inclusive legislation and policies. Since our founding in 1973, PFLAG works every day to ensure LGBTQ+ people everywhere are safe, celebrated, empowered and loved.

- ♥ For support through monthly virtual meetings, visit our PFLAG Connects: Military Community at [pflag.org/events/military-community](https://pflag.org/events/military-community).
- ♥ For 24/7 virtual peer-to-peer support, join our national online community at [facebook.com/groups/pflagnational](https://facebook.com/groups/pflagnational).

## **Q Chat Space**

**qchatspace.org | (954) 765-6024 | qchatspace.org/ContactUs**

Q Chat Space is a program of PFLAG National, CenterLink, and Planned Parenthood Federation of America that provides an online, chat-based system for LGBTQ+ teens, ages 13-19, moderated by trained LGBTQ center staff.

## **Trans Family Support Services**

**transfamilysos.org/services/support-groups | transfamilysos.org/contact-us**

Trans Family Support Services guides transgender/non-binary youth and their families through the gender-transitioning process to help make it the most positive experience possible. They provide family coaching, assistance with healthcare and insurance issues, help navigating the legal system, and support at schools. They also hold online support meetings for youth, parents, and caregivers.

## Endnotes

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**“There is still a lot of work to be done, but together we can make the military a better place for all our families. Human rights should not be based on your zip code! Especially when military families serving our Nation don’t get to choose what the zip code will be.”**

– Mother to Four LGBTQ+ Kids, Air Force Spouse



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