

LGBTQ during the holidays: Outright Vermont offers tips for hard conversations

[Maleeha Syed](#), Burlington Free Press Published 7:23 a.m. ET Dec. 3, 2018 | Updated 8:28 a.m. ET Dec. 3, 2018

At Outright Vermont, parents and adult family members of LGBTQ and questioning youth meet monthly to discuss their lives and share advice. Burlington Free Press

Those with non-traditional gender identities or sexual orientations sometimes dread holidays with their families.

Dana Kaplan, Outright Vermont executive director, tweeted words of encouragement to its members for the holidays. Outright Vermont is a nonprofit that offers "[support, advocacy, and celebration of young queer people in Vermont](#)."

Kaplan broke down for the Free Press a few ways members of the LGBTQ community and their families can work to avoid misunderstandings and foster healthy environments for one another.

Tips for the holidays as a member of the LGBTQ community

Kaplan emphasized individuals should remember they are loved just as they are, and deserve to be both seen and validated.

1) Remember to treat yourself with self-care. Some examples include:

- Compiling lists of who affirms your identity and understands you
- If you do not have anyone in mind, recognize that Outright Vermont can be that resource. The nonprofit's programs run throughout the holidays.
- Maintaining a list in your pocket of affirmations. These can include affirmations you have received from others and remembering what makes you feel good —whether it be the clothes you wear or an old stuffed animal.

"It's really about taking care of you and your needs," Kaplan said.

Kaplan reminded those who identify as LGBTQ that setting boundaries for oneself is OK to do.

2) Manage your own expectations

Kaplan acknowledged LGBTQ individuals might hope their loved ones quickly accept their identities. However, they encouraged people to be mindful of the head space relatives are in.

Kaplan suggested finding smaller moments of success instead, "seeing some movement where it can be hard to see."

3) Know when to seek out your support systems

Kaplan recommended LGBTQ members note who their allies are (recalling the self-care list of people who affirm their identity). For example, if one family member has difficulty using the proper pronoun but a sibling understands, Kaplan suggested going to the latter to think up ways of addressing the hurdle.

Tips for the holidays as a relative of someone in the LGBTQ community

LGBTQ youth who face high rejection from family are [eight times more likely to attempt suicide](#) compared to those who do not, according to Georgetown University's National Center for Cultural Competence.

1) Be mindful of assumptions/language

Kaplan noted that implying ideas of what is considered "appropriate attire", for example, can be harmful. They encouraged family members to let LGBTQ members map out their own courses and conversations.

2) Be mindful of slip-ups with names and pronouns

Individuals who are transgender might find themselves correcting family members on whether they identify as he/she/they, as well as the names they go by. Kaplan urged family members to quickly apologize if they find themselves doing this. This can be as simple as saying, "I'm really sorry. I'll do better next time."

They noted youth are clever and will find ways to help their family out. Kaplan recalled someone describing a piggy-bank system, in which a mix up warranted a quarter in the jar as a method of fostering understanding and mindfulness.

3) Be aware of the stressors associated with coming out

"If something is new or uncomfortable for you, don't privilege your feelings..." Kaplan said of family members learning about a relative coming out. They encouraged them to be aware that this undertaking often requires a substantial amount of courage.

Kaplan acknowledged people accepting their relative's gender identity or sexual orientation is not necessarily an overnight process. But they encouraged family members to reconcile this information separately, so they do not neglect to offer support for their loved ones.

If you or someone you know needs support regarding their LGBTQ identity, Outright

Vermont can be reached at 802-865-9677 and info@outrightvt.org.