



From the Blog of:
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**OMG, My Kid Just Came Out. Now
What?**

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So there you are, catching up on emails and doing a little online shopping when your kid comes in and sits in a chair across from you. Minutes go by and neither of you say a thing. Finally, you look up to realize you are being stared at. And then you get the warning shot, "Mom/Dad, there's something I want to talk to you about."

Maybe you hear the squeak in your child's voice, maybe you sense this is not about a failing grade, but even if you have a second to compose yourself before the, "I'm gay," that comes next, you are likely going to look like a deer caught in the headlights.

How do you react when your kid comes out as gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender?

You should know that your kid has probably rehearsed this conversation a million times before actually having it with you. The question is, have you rehearsed your response? Do you have any idea what you would say? What you would do?

If I could give you a formula, this is what I would suggest:

1. "I love you."

This is first. Say these words. Then show them with your body. A hug works, or if you aren't the huggy type, then move closer and put a hand on your kid's knee. Look in her eyes and then say it again. Even if you aren't the "I love you" type, say it.

2. "Thank you for trusting me."

Say this in whatever way makes sense to you. Because he did trust you. It took a lot for him to tell you this news. The fact that your kid just trusted you enough to be this vulnerable is a bigger deal than the news that he's LGBTQ. Acknowledge this and you will also show that you can stand in your kid's shoes. That you get it.

3. "Tell me more."

I think parents are afraid of saying something wrong. The good news is that if you stick with "tell me more," you won't actually say anything wrong. And truly, the most important thing for you to do is to *listen*. You don't need to ask if your child is in love, how long she's known, if this is because of that uncle, if people at school know. In fact, don't ask those things. Not yet. All of those questions might mean one thing to you (I'm interested and want to show you that I care) but might translate to something entirely different to your child (my parent thinks this is only a phase, is embarrassed or afraid I've told other people, is mad at me). Just close your mouth and listen.

(Repeat #s 1-3 as many times as necessary)

4. Follow up.

After it's all done and your kid has gone off to bed (or you've gone to bed and your kid has gone to his room to text that friend who knew tonight was the big night), you are both going to replay the conversation a hundred times. And then you are going to replay the past decade to try to remember what you might have said to either support or not support your child. You're going to think of all the questions you have. And you might feel sad or scared for your kid. Because there are things that are scary. There are statistics about LGBTQ kids being more susceptible to depression and suicide and bullying, etc. But don't go there. You need to focus. This is actually a very important time for you to solidify your position as a supportive parent.

Instead of freaking yourself out and thinking of every bad thing you've ever heard on the news, get out a pen and write a letter to your kid. Do #1-3 again in writing. Why? Because then your kid can read those words again and again. It will serve as proof. Date the letter, tell your child everything you love and admire about him, tell her you are proud of her, and tell her all the reasons why. Love your kid intensely and with urgency. And then go stick that note on your kid's backpack or tape it to the iPhone charging station or pin it to the bathroom mirror. Then, and only then, should you go to bed, because then you can be sure your child's tears will be from gratitude and joy, not loneliness and fear.

Do you need to throw a coming out party the next weekend? Probably not. But it might be worth checking in about what your child would and would not be comfortable with. I wonder sometimes how I might have felt if my mom had asked if it was okay for her to tell her friends after I came out to her. Or if she'd just included the news in a general update—Liz has decided to major in psychology, we love her new girlfriend, and oh, she's thinking about traveling to Spain this summer. I think that probably would have been cool. It would have been another way for her to show she was not embarrassed of me.

And if you do it wrong, if you totally screw up because you were having a bad day or you didn't understand what they were saying, and so you said something that you now realize was wildly inappropriate, don't pretend it didn't happen. You can't un-do it, but you can try again. The truth is, you're going to screw up lots of times. There will be lots of offensive things you do and say. Even people with the best of intentions put their feet in their mouths. But your children will forgive you.

Just remember, they love you. And they want to be proud of you just as much as you want to be proud of them.

When you are ready to learn more, you can find some great resources at PFLAG.

<https://www.elizabethberges.com>