



Tips for “Coming Out” to Your Kids About Your Sexual Orientation

The first thing to note is that it is really terrific that you are taking time to consider how to sensitively approach “coming out” to your kids.* Here at COLAGE we have found that as children, we really want to know the truth about our parents’ sexual orientation, and usually we have some idea before you even tell us! But just because we want to know doesn’t mean that we always are thrilled about the situation, especially initially. It can signify a big change in the family, especially when accompanied with all the transitions that come with a divorce or break-up. These tips can also be helpful even if you were already “out” when your kid(s) were born.

* Note: This primarily focuses on the issue of parents “coming out” to their children about their sexual orientation and discussing questions and challenges that come up in that “coming out” process. COLAGE also acknowledges that “coming out” is not a one time thing (which is why it is in quotes) and that this resource may apply in different ways throughout a parent and their child’s life.

Here are some tips to keep in mind that might help:

- It’s **never too early** to come out to your child/ren. Kids understand love. What they don’t understand is deception or hiding. And it’s **never too late** to come out to your child. COLAGE has met folks in their forties whose parents are just now coming out to them. A lot of mysteries are being solved, and missing puzzle pieces falling into place for these families. Often knowing the truth will be a relief for kids of all ages
- Tell your child/ren in a **private space** where the conversation can’t be overheard and will be completely confidential. Telling them at your regular Saturday night dinner at your favorite restaurant will be overwhelming.

- Make sure you tell them when there will be **plenty of time for the conversation** to continue if it needs to. If they are staying with you for the weekend, for example, talk with the kids on Saturday morning instead of waiting 'til the drive back to their other home on Sunday night.
- If you are agonizing over exactly what to say, **try writing it down first or practicing** with a friend.
- **Kids responses are going to vary.** Some may need some time and space to process the information on their own. Some might have a million questions. Others may barely react at all. No matter how your kids respond to your coming out, honor the process that they need to go through for themselves.
- **Listen and ask** your children what they already know and feel about LGBTQ people. Both as a starting point for them to have a discussion about sexual orientation; as well as in regards to suspicions they may have had about you.
- Don't think that coming out to your kids means it's time to have "the big sex talk." **Explain your sexuality in age-appropriate ways and in ways that they can understand.** Talk about having feelings of love, care, and concern, along with attraction, for the same sex. If you are involved with someone and feel comfortable sharing this information, it's a good idea as you will be explaining your feelings for someone your kids know. Another person makes the whole thing more concrete and less abstract.
- **Think of this as a lifelong conversation, not a one-time deal.** Your children's thoughts, feelings, and questions will continue over time and change as they get older. This month they might not care, next month they might be mortified, next year they may have lots of questions. Keep the conversation alive; the tricky part is avoiding them feeling like you want to talk about it ALL the time (but believe me, that's better than not enough).
- **Let them know that no matter what, you love them.** One of the main things kids worry about is that you will no longer share the common interests that you used to, or that you will somehow be different than you used to be. At the time of coming out some parents do go through what we fondly refer to as a "second adolescence." Let your kids know that you are happy and are enjoying a new aspect of your life, but that no matter what, they are your number one priority.

And then prove it to them by being consistent, attentive, and communicative.

- Help **break down stereotypes** of gay people for them. If your children already know other gay people draw comparisons between you and them. If they don't, tell them things that may seem obvious to you, like not all gay men are hairdressers; give examples of famous LGBTQ people who they can look up to. They may be concerned that your whole personality is going to change now that you are gay; **reassure them that you are still you**, being gay is simply one more thing about you and that there is no one way that all LGBTQ people must be and act.
- **Give them options of other supportive adults** to talk with. Sometimes it's easier for kids to express some of their feelings with another adult because they don't want to hurt your feelings. If one of your parents, siblings, or friends is being especially supportive or there is another adult that you trust, arrange for them to spend time with the kids to provide a sounding board.
- **Your kids may be gay. They may be straight.** Either way, it's not a judgment on your parenting. Nor are they doomed to a life of loneliness and desperation and homophobia (if they are gay). Be as supportive of your kid's orientation as you wish your parents were of yours.
- **Respect your kids' wishes** about how, when, and who they come out to about you. Let them tell their friends, peers, and others at their own pace and in their own time. Recognize that now they too have the joy and burden of coming out.
- **Most importantly, connect them with other kids who have LGBTQ parents.** Studies show that when children know they are not alone and have opportunities to share with other kids with LGBTQ parents, they have fewer problems. Go to events with your local LGBTQ family group if there is one, go to Family Week co-sponsored by COLAGE and Family Equality Council in the summer, buy books for them about gay families, have the kids join on-line groups run by COLAGE, become COLAGE members so your family can connect to other families in your area. Just let them know they are part of a community that cares and understands. They are not alone. Millions of other kids have experienced what they are now going through and there are ways that they can connect to this caring community of peers.