

## Grandfamilies and Kinship Support for LGBTQ+ Youth

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Grandfamily and kin caregivers take on the responsibility of raising children whose parents cannot. When a young person comes out as LGBTQ+, their kin/grandfamily caregiver may need help understanding the terms used and how best to support their young person. The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network hosted a [webinar](#) on July 25, 2024, during which SAGE and PFLAG National shared strategies from their [Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Grandchild](#) toolkit. This tip sheet can be shared directly with caregivers.

*“There is nothing more important than building solid bridges of understanding between LGBTQ individuals and their loved ones. The ability to do this can literally mean the difference between life and death. Grandparents are the source of unconditional love for their grandchildren. When a grandchild comes to you to discuss matters of sexual orientation and gender identity, they are depending on you to listen to them and not judge them.”*

– Dear Abby, in the Foreword to [Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Grandchild](#)

### **We all have a gender identity and sexual orientation.**

- ▶ Cisgender is the term used for people whose internal sense of being male or female matches their assigned sex.
- ▶ Transgender and nonbinary are terms used by people whose gender identity does not correspond with their assigned sex as well as people who do not feel that they fit into the man-woman binary. Other terms used include genderqueer and gender nonconforming.
- ▶ Sexual orientation describes one’s feelings of attraction—to include physical, emotional, psychological, intellectual, and spiritual—towards other people. Common terms include asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, and straight.
- ▶ It is important to note that sexual orientation is separate and distinct from gender identity and gender expression.

### **There is no age minimum for when a young person may start to realize their gender identity and sexual orientation.**

- ▶ Kids are coming out earlier than ever, often because they have supportive family and adults who provide a safe space to come out as LGBTQ+.

- ▶ Sexual or romantic experiences are not necessary to understand one's attractions to other people.
- ▶ For most people who are transgender or nonbinary, their sense of gender identity happens early in their development.
- ▶ Kids need to explore and gender is often one of those explorations—it is good to give them space to do that.
- ▶ Trust kids—they know who they are.

### **Identifying as LGBTQ+ is not a phase that young people will grow out of.**

- ▶ Sexual orientation and gender identity are not a choice, or changeable through things like talk therapy or, for faith-based people, praying.
- ▶ The most important thing to communicate is that you love them.
- ▶ Let them guide the conversation.

### **Steps for responding to jokes and comments about LGBTQ+ people:**

- ▶ Be open and direct—with permission, of course. “I have an LGBTQ+ grandchild and your comments are hurtful to me.”
- ▶ Share your personal story—people might learn from your experience.
- ▶ If you are concerned that someone might become hostile due to the topic being discussed, prioritize your safety by ending the conversation or walking away.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **Should I ask my younger kin if they are LGBTQ+?**

- ▶ Let your loved one lead.
- ▶ When they are ready, they will talk to you if they feel it is safe to do so.
- ▶ If you have a sense that your loved one might want to talk, but is not doing so on their own, a gentle open-ended question, such as, “How did things go at school today?” can open the door to dialogue. Express your support, do not push, and really listen when they talk.

### **I am afraid I will say something wrong or offensive to my LGBTQ+ family and friends. What should I do?**

- ▶ At some point, everyone says the wrong thing...and that is okay!

- ▶ If you are corrected, say, “Thank you for telling me that.”
- ▶ Apologize.
- ▶ Do better next time...and practice if you need to.
- ▶ Also, if you are struggling with your feelings, continue to support your loved one and find places to take your struggle away from your loved one. This is your struggle, not theirs.

## Resources and Support

### SAGE

- ▶ SAGE Text-Based Support: <https://www.sageusa.org/hearme/>
- ▶ [Best Practice Guides for Supporting LGBT Older Adults](#)

### PFLAG National

- ▶ [Supporting Your LGBTQ+ Grandchild \(English and Spanish\)](#)
- ▶ [PFLAG Connects: Grandparent Community](#)
- ▶ Find a PFLAG chapter near you: [pflag.org/find](http://pflag.org/find)
- ▶ Join the PFLAG National Online Community at [facebook.com/groups/pflagnational](https://facebook.com/groups/pflagnational)

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The Grandfamilies & Kinship Support Network: A National Technical Assistance Center (Network) helps government agencies and nonprofits in states, tribes, and territories work across jurisdictional and systemic boundaries to improve supports and services for families in which grandparents, other relatives, or close family friends are raising children whose parents are unable to do so. For more information, please visit [www.GKSNetwork.org](http://www.GKSNetwork.org).

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