



unconditional love

the
get
Real
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Studies show that family and caregiver support can make a critical difference in the wellbeing of 2SLGBTQ+ youth.

But what does support look like? What is my role in being an ally through the coming out process of my child, my sibling, or my family member?

We recognize that these are not simple questions, with simple answers. We are all at different stages of learning, and come from different lived experiences, and every family is unique. But at the same time, so many of us have learnings to share, from going through this process ourselves; stories of support, of growing together, and the things that helped that process along the way. This is why we created Unconditional Love.

Unconditional Love is an online educational resource to help families navigate the coming out process through education, tips, and additional resources. The webpage is a hub of videos featuring real stories and advice from five diverse families, including a downloadable PDF with our **5 key tips** and additional resources for both families and youth.

It's important for us to note that the term "family" can mean many different things, and looks unique to everyone! We are using the word to encompass any situation where a guardian or caregiver is looking out for the wellbeing of someone coming out. We often use the word "child" in this resource, but you could use this tool to support a sibling, close friend, family member or anyone else!

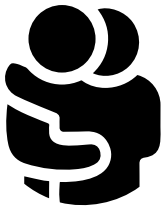
Our **5 key tips** are:

1. Prepare
2. Listen
3. Affirm
4. Educate
5. Support

We at Get REAL are thrilled to be able to bring these stories and resources together to allow families to understand that they are not alone and we hope that having access to Unconditional Love they are able to feel a little more comfortable navigating this journey with love and support.

None of this would have been possible without our sponsors. From the bottom of our hearts, thank you to the Pride Run, to Birks, and to the Kiwanis Foundation for giving us the ability to create this very important resource. We appreciate your support for the 2SLGBTQ+ community.





prepare



“It’s more the language you use around them. Even before your child comes out - watch the things you say, and the content that is shown to them.” - D’Andrew

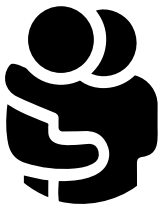
Preparing for someone coming out doesn’t mean that you’re guessing your child’s identity before they’ve told you! Preparing simply means building an inclusive and safer environment for everyone, whether or not your child has, or will come out. Not only will this make your child feel safer if they do come out, but it will teach them amazing habits and language to help them be an ally to 2SLGBTQ+ folks, regardless.

Some ways that you can foster an inclusive household are:

- Try to use inclusive, gender neutral language
- Being mindful to not use, and to speak out against derogatory slurs, stereotypes, and misinformation about the 2SLGBTQ+ community.
- Read books, and watch movies and television shows with inclusive themes, and diverse characters and subjects.
- Inform yourself & your kids about 2SLGBTQ+ History, & prominent figures.
- Go to places where you and your child will be exposed to diverse people.
- Have open communication with your child about supporting them no matter what.
- Make your acceptance visible and heard, children learn a lot from their parents so teaching your children to be respectful of people in the community will allow them to see that your home is a safe place for them or their friends!



“You don’t know what your kid is going to be when they grow up, so that’s the whole thing - making sure they’re comfortable to share parts of their life with you, knowing that you will be supportive.” - Courtney



listen

“The best thing you can do, as a parent is listen to your children, have meaningful conversations with your children- you would be very surprised at the kind of human beings that they will become when they grow up, if you give them that love and support.” - Maxine, D’Andrew’s Mom.



Learning how to listen without thinking of what to say next or necessarily giving advice is a skill we can all practice! It’s especially important when your child is figuring out or telling you about their identity - you can’t tell them how they should identify; they have to discover it on their own!

To let your child know they can talk to you, try:

- Telling them from a young age they can come to you about anything.
- Allowing them to come to you on their own time. For example, instead of persistently asking questions like “Are you gay?”, give them time to figure it out. They might not know yet themselves!
- Instead, you can say something like, “You know I love you and you can talk to me about whatever you need,” and leave it there.
- Being honest when you don’t know or need time to process information and asking for that.



“Ultimately, when your child comes out, whatever they’re coming out or identifying as, believe them. Regardless of how old they are, or what they’re talking about. Give your child the support, give your child the love, respect what your child has to say, and set your child up to be able to live in this world, regardless of who they are.” - Michael and Diana, Austin’s parents.



affirm



“There is no guide book on the perfect thing to say because it is relative to you what each kid needs. For me, my biggest point of advice would just be to pinpoint what their nerves are - whether it’s fear of acceptance, fear of being judged or fear of a change - there’s all these things that people are scared of. So if they’re dealing with shame, for example, it could be just saying something like, *I love you, just the same.*” - Sylvia

The way you respond to your child coming out can have a huge impact on their well-being, so making sure to clearly affirm your support, while being mindful of their feelings and how difficult it could have been for them to tell you, is very important.

Here are a few tips on ways you can validate your child during the coming out process:

- Tell them you love them.
- Ask them how you can support them and try to follow their suggestions.
- Avoid asking questions like “Do you think this is just a phase?” Instead, respect what your child is saying, and their opinions.
- Ask respectful questions.
- Don’t be afraid to talk with your child about their 2SLGBTQ+ identity. Casual conversations can help normalize things, and avoid feelings of discomfort.
- Look for resources to educate yourself and follow up with your child to check you’re on the right track.

Remember: it's okay if you're not familiar with words your child is using or don't understand everything they're saying. There's a lot to know and learn and it can feel overwhelming... Parents and guardians need to be affirmed too! Sometimes, the best thing you can do is be honest and tell your child you may not fully understand, but you love them and you're open to learning. And then, of course, make sure to follow through!

“Even if you believe it is a phase - even if it turns out to be a phase - your child is still going through that. So you should support whatever they are going through at the moment.” - Austin





educate



“Being an advocate for my son, meant I needed to inform myself.” - Diana, Austin’s Mom.

The more you understand, the less likely you will be to say or do something harmful, or rely on your children to educate you! And, as many studies have shown, your support is critical!

“Trans youth who indicated their parents were strongly supportive of their gender identity and expression were significantly more likely (72%) to report being satisfied with their lives than those with parents who were not strongly supportive (33%).”

Travers R, Bauer G, Pyne J, Bradley K, for the Trans PULSE Project; Gale L, Papadimitriou M. Impacts of Strong Parental Support for Trans Youth: A Report Prepared for Children’s Aid Society of Toronto and Delisle Youth Services. 2 October, 2012.

There are so many things you can learn about, but try not to get overwhelmed! You don’t need to be perfect - we learn from our mistakes just as much as we can learn from a book, movie or podcast. If you’re looking for some places to start, consider educating yourself on:

- The difference between sex, gender and attraction: [Gender Unicorn](#), [LGBTQr Codes](#)
- Pronouns (what they are and why they matter): [mypronouns.org](#); [Seventeen Magazine](#) - “[Trans Students Explain Why Gender Pronouns Are Important](#)”; [Jonas’ Small Acts Every Day](#).
- Local resources and supports in your area.

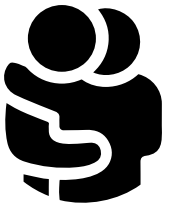
Here are some more places for you to start (or continue) your learning journey:

- [Unconditional Love](#)
- [Bind Safe](#)
- [P Flag](#)
- [LGBT Youthline](#)
- [Trevor Project](#)
- [It Gets Better](#)

For a longer list of resources, check out our [Resources](#) page!

“There is more of a responsibility on the parents especially if you have a young child to go out there and find the resources, find the community, find the books, find the shows that are inclusive and have representation.” - Courtney





support



“The intent matters so much. I think intentionally misgendering someone or intentionally not using someone’s pronoun is a lot more damaging than someone who loves you and is trying their best.”

- Jesse, Jonas’ brother.

Studies conclude that “family acceptance of LGBT adolescents is associated with positive young adult mental and physical health. Interventions that promote parental and caregiver acceptance of LGBT adolescents are needed to reduce health disparities.”

Ryan C, Russell ST, Huebner D, Sanchez DR. Family acceptance in adolescence and the health of LGBT young adults. [Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Nursing](#). 2010

Support comes in so many different shapes and sizes, but ultimately, it means you’re doing your best to be there for someone you love. For someone coming out, support might look like:

- Going to support groups and/or therapy together
- Using their chosen name and helping others do the same (as long you’ve been given permission to do so).
- Respecting their pronouns (even if they change) is important and validating.
- Helping them find resources in the area.
- Advocating for your loved one, especially when they are young, is very important in their journey. This could mean making sure their rights and needs are being respected, i.e at school, in the healthcare system, legally.
- Not sure where to start or how you’re doing? Try asking! “How can I support you?” or, “Hey! I just wanted to check in: how am I doing? What could I be doing better?”

“We found that some of these rejecting behaviors – such as blocking access to gay friends and resources or preventing a gay youth from attending family events – were just as harmful as physically beating a gay or transgender child.” 2009, Caitlin Ryan, PhD, *Family Acceptance Project*

“The thing about pronouns that a lot of people don’t consider is that, it’s not just trans people who have them. You too have a pronoun, even if you don’t identify within this community, and your use of your own pronouns, as well as using the correct pronouns of others, can make a huge difference.”
- Jonas





resources

This is not a complete list of resources, but a short list of other information you may find beneficial on this journey. Please research and find what works best for you!

[Resources Toronto](#) [Egal]

[Rainbow Health Resource Toronto](#)

[Fact Sheet: “Supporting Gender Independent Children”](#) (For health and social service providers)

[Confidential Peer Support](#) [Youth Line]

[Family Acceptance Project Educational Posters](#) (Available in 10 different languages)

[Human Rights Campaign: All Families](#) - All Families promotes LGBTQ+ inclusive policies and affirming practices among child welfare.

[Native Youth Sexual Health Network](#)

[Native Youth Sexual Health Network for Indigiqueer, Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and Gender Non-Conforming Indigenous youth](#) [PDF]

[PFLAG Canada](#)

[PFLAG: Loving Family](#) (Provincial Chapters)

Gender Identity Hotline (Includes support for parents and ally's
Toll-free:
1-888-822-9494

[Supporting Our Youth, Sherbourne Health](#)

[LGBTQ+ Religion](#) [The Trevor Project]

[Gender Creative Kids](#) (A community resource)

[Trans Student Educational Resource](#)



resources

CONTINUED

[Families In Transition](#) (An on-line resource for parents of trans youth Central Toronto Youth Services)

[Family Services Ottawa](#) (Community Programming)

[2SLGBTQIA Newcomers Halifax](#)

[Plea Community Services BC, Trans Support](#)

[Support for Parents BC \[QMunity\]](#)

[OutLoud Pride Group Alberta](#)