

What to Do If Your Child Says He's Gay

What do you do if your child comes home one day and announces he or she is gay? This act of self-disclosure presents an incredible challenge for Christian parents, especially in light of the deep chasm between secular thought on homosexuality and the biblical approach.

More than Thirty years ago secular psychiatry and psychology declared that homosexuality is not a disorder or some form of psychopathology. Twelve years ago, the American Psychological Association took the stance that Christian reparative therapy (therapy aimed at loving gays out of their lifestyle and into a right relationship with God) was not only scientifically ineffective but also unnecessary and possibly harmful.

Naturally, as a Christian parent, you will choose to adhere to biblical morality and not the current cultural opinion. However, it is important that you not cut off the parent-child relationship. Too many Christian parents are overcome with fear—fear they'll be ostracized by their peers, fear of their own failure and fear of lovingly facing their own children.

It might help to ask yourself the following questions:

1. Did I love my child prior to knowing their sexual identity?

Of course! They are a part of you, and nothing will change that, not even their self-proclaimed sexuality. The parent-child relationship should be based on unconditional love.

This doesn't mean you find their sexuality morally acceptable. It means you love them in spite of what they say they are. That's the way God loves us. We disappoint Him, sin, have moral failures and rebel, but He still loves us because we are His children.

2. Does their sexuality define our relationship?

Hopefully not, even though it may be a tremendous disappointment to you. Deal with it but don't get stuck in it. Talk to them. Stay connected and committed to wanting the best for them. If you need more support, get involved with an organization that provides counsel. You may be surprised at the well-organized efforts of many Christians who reach out to gays.

If you feel disgusted (as many parents do), try not to focus on the behavior. Focus on what may have led to the behavior.

Many gays struggle with self-abasement. You don't want to add to feelings of inadequacy by rejecting a child who is desperate for your love. Their seeking same-sex partners may be driven by the need to be accepted.

Begin to discuss with your child when their sexual feelings became apparent, how they developed, when they were first acted upon and how they came to the conclusion they did about their sexual identity. I know this is a difficult step for parents to take, but it's a necessary one. Working with a Christian therapist who has experience dealing with homosexuals might help.

3. What would Jesus do in this situation?

Jesus loves the gay person but never approves of the lifestyle. His Word declares homosexual behavior is a sin.

However, when He was on earth, Jesus socialized with sinners. If He were here now, He would be hanging out with gays, loving them and frequenting AIDS hospices. Jesus healed the brokenhearted. He told us to do the same.

Many Christian counseling groups and "ex-gays" are committed to helping gays come out of the lifestyle and live a holy life before God. They will be the first to tell you, it's not an

easy task. Even those who want to leave the lifestyle experience a strong pull to stay in it. Some do find total freedom. Others struggle with their impulses and regularly fight homosexual tendencies. The important thing is not the struggle but the daily overcoming.

Realize that your child is in a difficult place and is searching for authentic love. Don't get preachy. Don't look at them as less of a human being.

Ask God to give you wisdom to deal with your child in love. Be willing to look at your part of the problem and start making changes. Your demonstrated acceptance may be the key to change. Rather than alienating them, choose to be part of their healing.

Linda S. Mintle, PH.D., is a licensed clinical social worker based in Chicago. She welcomes your questions about relationships, emotional problems and the tough issues of life.