

A STRAIGHT GUIDE TO GLBT AMERICANS



WELCOME

Maybe you always suspected. Maybe it's a total surprise. But no matter what, the moment a friend, loved one or acquaintance makes the decision to come out and tell you about being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender, it is always a unique event.

For a lot of people, learning that someone they know and care about is GLBT can open a range of emotions, from confused to concerned, awkward to honored. It may be hard to know how to react — leaving you with questions about what to say, how to talk about being GLBT and wanting to know what you can do to be supportive.

Whatever brought you here — you have come to the right place. This guide is designed to help build understanding and comfort.

Whether you have been openly supporting the GLBT community for years or are just coming to terms with having someone in your life come out, this guide can help you work through your feelings so that you can express your acceptance and be ever more supportive. And it will give you important information you should know about what it means to be GLBT in America today.

This resource was written to include all the basics, so that if you are brand-new to GLBT issues we will answer many of your questions. Or, if you have known GLBT people for years and are simply looking to find new ways to show your support, you can skim and take the pieces that are relevant to you.

The Human Rights Campaign and its Coming Out Project hope this resource, created in partnership with Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), helps you build bridges of understanding with the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in your life. Welcome.



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
COMING OUT PROJECT

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 2 In the Beginning
- 2 A Note on Outing
- 3 When Someone Lets You Know
- 4 Dealing With Your Feelings When Someone Comes Out
- 6 Having Conversations
- 8 Talking With Your Straight Friends and Family
- 9 Have Courage
- 10 The Path to Support
- 12 Some Facts You Should Know
- 13 Will People Think I'm Gay?
- 14 Ways to Show Your Support
- 16 Reference: Glossary of Terms
- 18 Reference: Myths & Facts About GLBT People
- 19 Reference: Additional Resources
- 21 A Message From HRC President Joe Solmonese



The work to make America safer and fairer for GLBT people will take the effort and understanding of both straight and GLBT Americans. That is why it is so important that you are reading this guide.



IN THE BEGINNING

Someone you know and care about is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. He or she has “come out” to you, either directly in conversation or by letting you know in some other way.

If you take nothing else away from this guide, remember this: that person in your life who opened up to you made a conscious choice to let you into his or her life. That is an act of trust. And in taking this step, that person has said that he or she wants your relationship to be based on truth.

Now, it is up to both of you to find the courage to accept the challenge of honesty. That means being honest with yourself — acknowledging your feelings and coming to terms with them. And it means being honest with this person in your life — asking questions you need to ask, learning the facts and making the effort to understand the realities of being a GLBT individual so that you can be truly informed and supportive.



A NOTE ON OUTING

Unfortunately, there are times when a GLBT person’s sexual orientation or gender identity may be exposed without his or her knowledge or consent. Most GLBT people prefer to come out in their own ways and in their own time. “Outing” takes the decision-making out of the individual’s hands, which can be painful and awkward for everyone involved.

If someone has not chosen to come out to you, do not assume that he or she does not trust or care for you. The person may have simply not been ready, or may have still been coming to terms with his or her own sexual orientation or gender identity.

Showing your support, acceptance and respect for a GLBT person who has been outed can help the healing process and may help both of you to build a stronger, more genuine relationship.





WHEN SOMEONE LETS YOU KNOW

When a close friend or family member, or even a colleague, tells you that he or she is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender — either directly or indirectly — that person is also telling you that you are someone who matters, and that he or she wants to be honest and genuine with you.

No one knows for sure what makes gay people gay, or why transgender people are transgender. If you ask most GLBT people, they will tell you that they did not choose their sexual orientation or gender identity any more than they chose to be right- or left-handed — it simply is how they were born.

All available research on sexual orientation and gender identity strongly suggests that there is some biological component that defines an individual's orientation or innate gender.

At the end of the day, the “hows” and “whys” are not important. What is important is that someone in your life has made a conscious decision to reveal an important part of his or her individuality to you.

You should know that the act of coming out can be challenging. Most GLBT people who come out feel a wide range of emotions — from fear, to relief, to pride. Often, they don't know how their friends, family and others will react.

But they do know that they want their relationships to be based on honesty.



Talk about it.



DEALING WITH YOUR FEELINGS WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT

So now you have some sense of what it feels like to come out to others. But what about how you feel?

Typically, straight people who have just had someone come out to them report feeling:

Honored that someone has chosen you to entrust this revelation:

“It was a cool moment. I’ll remember it for the rest of my life. You only share something like this with people who matter.”

— Sharon, a sister, Wyoming

Admiration for courage and honesty:

“I am proud of him because he is choosing to live his life his way.”

— Dan, a friend, Illinois

Accepting and wanting to move on:

“You shouldn’t build a relationship on whether you are gay or straight. True friendship is not based on that.”

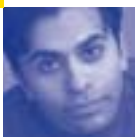
— Chris, a college friend, Idaho

Curious about what life is like for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people:

“Why? How? You ask those questions.”

— Brandon, a dad, Oregon





Apprehension or discomfort:

“The unknown causes you to pull back.”

— Donna, a co-worker, Florida

Disapproval of the perceived “gay lifestyle:”

“I never ask him about it — I don’t accept it.”

— Steve, an uncle, Maine

Anxiety for the well-being of your gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender friend or family member:

“What are you supposed to do? How are we supposed to act? I get angry at how the world will treat him.”

— Amy, a mom, Texas

It is normal to feel many of these seemingly contradictory emotions at once, leaving you uncertain.

Feeling uncertain doesn’t make you a bad person. It doesn’t mean you are homophobic or transphobic. It does mean that you should take the time to work through your feelings so that you can support your friend, loved one or acquaintance without reservation.

You don’t have to bottle up your emotions for fear of saying the wrong thing. Use them as the basis for an honest conversation. Ask the questions you need to ask. Have a real talk. And when it’s over, you’re likely to find that your relationship is stronger and richer than ever.

Talk about it.



HAVING CONVERSATIONS

Having conversations about life as a gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender person may be difficult. It is normal to feel a little awkward, or be a little afraid of saying the “wrong thing” and making it “weird.”

Here are some ways to help start an open dialogue:

Ask Respectful Questions to Show You Are Interested

- When did you know?
- What was it like growing up?
- What kind of relationship would you ideally hope for in your life?

Be Honest

- Tell your friend this is new for you — and if you feel awkward, say so.
- Ask your relative to be honest with you about what you say or do that may make him or her uncomfortable.
- Tell your acquaintance if he or she does or says something that makes you uncomfortable.
- Be as open and honest as you would like your co-worker to be with you.
- Ask the “dumb questions.”

Laugh a Little

Humor helps break the ice, if it’s done gently and respectfully. As long as you’re sure that you’re laughing **with** people, and not **at** them — feel free to bring a little humor to the conversation.

Understand, too, that while some GLBT people may use derogatory terms with one another in a way that they think is funny or affectionate, that does not mean that you, as a straight person, should necessarily follow their lead. For instance, some GLBT people will make jokes, calling one another “queer” (and sometimes much worse), but would feel hurt if a straight friend or family member used the same word.





Send Gentle Signals

Showing and sharing your acceptance and support can be very easy. Straight people often don't realize that GLBT people keep watch for signs from their straight friends, family and acquaintances about whether it is safe to be open with them.

Some ways you can show your support include:

- Casually mentioning a news item about a GLBT issue in a positive way.
- Mentioning other GLBT friends or family you might have.
- Putting a symbol like the Human Rights Campaign equal sign, the PFLAG symbol or a sticker from another GLBT-supportive organization in your office or home.
- Refraining from using demeaning words or letting others tell anti-GLBT jokes in your presence without challenging them.



Talk about it!



TALKING WITH YOUR STRAIGHT FRIENDS & FAMILY

After someone in your life has come out to you — particularly if it is someone close to you, like a child or loved one — you may find yourself deciding how, or if, to tell people in your life that someone you care about is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

It's important to remember that the person who has just come out to you could be sensitive about how, when and with whom his or her sexual orientation or gender identity is discussed. This might be especially true if you are one of the first people he or she has told, if he or she was outed in a way that adds stress, or if his or her work or home life could be adversely affected by the disclosure. Remember that your friend or family member would probably prefer to stay in control of his or her own coming out process.

There is, in fact, a strict policy of confidentiality at all Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) community-based support groups, so that everyone can feel safe sharing personal feelings and information.

That said, as long as you have the permission of the person who has come out to you to speak with others about it, these conversations can:

- Help you digest the information.
- Provide support as you sort through your emotions.
- Build more honest and genuine relationships.

By opening up and being honest with the people in your life about knowing and caring for a GLBT person, you will be taking a small, but important, step toward making the world more understanding and supportive for that person.

As you begin to have conversations with others about having someone close to you come out, you will probably use many of the same skills and lessons that will help you talk openly with the person who just came out to you.

Remember that more often than not, people will take their cues from you about how to deal with this.



HAVE COURAGE

Gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people often grow up feeling “different” from the rest — and are typically keenly aware that the things that make them different may cause them to be rejected or discriminated against.

Just as it takes courage for GLBT people to be open and honest about who they are, it also takes courage to support your GLBT friends or loved ones.



We live in a society where prejudice still exists; where discrimination, both legal and illegal, is still far too common; and where even the physical safety of your friend, loved one or acquaintance can be at risk. That’s an unfortunate reality — and that’s part of your friend or loved one’s life.

Recognizing these facts and giving your support to that person will not only take your relationship to a higher level — it can also help take a small step toward a better and more tolerant world, for your loved one and for all of us.





THE PATH TO SUPPORT

While there is no “right” way to become a more supportive friend, loved one or colleague, there is a process that many go through in learning how to be ever more supportive.



AWKWARDNESS, EMBARRASSMENT, UNCERTAINTY & CURIOSITY

Dealing with the initial surprise and newness of learning that a friend, loved one or acquaintance is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. This period can be awkward and challenging as you begin your process of understanding.



ACCEPTANCE

Coming to terms with the fact that your friend, family member or acquaintance is GLBT, and that sexual orientation and gender expression are basic parts of who people are, like their eye, hair or skin colors.





SUPPORT

Realizing that in order to have genuine, open connections to GLBT friends or family members, you will have to find a way to support them as they are — and then do so.



LETTING YOUR SUPPORT INFORM YOUR DECISIONS

Finally, it's about working to develop a true understanding of what it means to be GLBT in America and trying to do your part to help break down the walls of prejudice and discrimination that still exist — for example, by supporting businesses with appropriate anti-discrimination policies, saying you don't appreciate "humor" that demeans GLBT people when it happens or learning about where political candidates stand on issues that impact the GLBT community.



SOME FACTS YOU SHOULD KNOW

Part of being ever more supportive of your gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender friends, loved ones or acquaintances means developing a true understanding of how the world views and treats them.

There is a lot of good news on this front. Over the past decades, America has become a much more open and tolerant country. From “Will & Grace” to Ellen DeGeneres, mainstream America is becoming far more comfortable with issues that were once taboo.

SOME INTERESTING FACTS:

- Same-sex couples live in 99.3 percent of all counties nationwide. (2000 U.S. Census)
- There are more than 1 million gay and lesbian veterans in the United States. (Urban Institute)
- More than half of all Fortune 500 Companies offer domestic partner health benefits to their employees’ same-sex partners. (2005-2006 HRC State of the Workplace Report)
- In a national poll in 2006, 80 percent of Catholics said they agree with this statement: “Marriage is about love and commitment. Regardless of how I personally feel about gay people getting married, I don’t think it is my place to judge these people’s love for and commitment to each other.” (Accredited Research by Peter D. Hart & Associates)
- There are at least 1 million children being raised by same-sex couples in the United States — and probably many more. (2000 U.S. Census)
- Sixty-one percent of Americans believe the country needs laws protecting transgender individuals from discrimination. (2002 HRC Foundation poll)

Yet, even as we justifiably celebrate this progress, you should also know that your GLBT friends and loved ones are likely to face real challenges in their lives.

SOME UNFORTUNATE, BUT TRUE, FACTS:

- You can still be fired from your job in most states, simply for being GLBT, and have no legal recourse — because currently, no federal non-discrimination law protects GLBT Americans.

- Eighty-four percent of GLBT students report being verbally harassed — name-calling, threats, etc. — at school. (GLSEN 2003)
- Hate crimes against GLBT Americans are on the rise, even as other violent crimes continue to decline. Current federal hate crime laws do not protect GLBT Americans. (FBI Hate Crimes Statistics 2004)

You need to know these facts, not so you can worry — but so that you can do something about it.

WILL PEOPLE THINK I'M GAY?

This is a question that many people have — and are often afraid to ask out loud. The simple answer is: Yes, it is possible that people may wonder if you are gay if you show your support for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender issues.

At the same time, most people understand that supporting fairness and equality for GLBT people does not mean that a person is gay.

Usually, people who do not personally know or care about someone who is GLBT will look to you to set the tone for how to talk about GLBT issues. If you are at ease as you talk about GLBT issues, odds are others will take their cues from you.

The women's suffrage movement was successful because women and men who supported fairness stood shoulder-to-shoulder. The fight against Jewish defamation was successful because people of all faiths took stands against discrimination. The African-American civil rights struggle was supported by people of all races and ethnicities.

The work to make America safer and fairer for GLBT people will take the effort and understanding of both straight and GLBT Americans. That is why it is so important that you are reading this guide.



WAYS TO SHOW YOUR SUPPORT

There are many different ways that you can show your support for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in your life. Again, there is no one “right” way to demonstrate your support — and being supportive does not require you to march in parades or become an activist.

Here are some easy ways you might demonstrate your support that fit naturally into most people’s lives:

- Create social settings that bring together your straight and GLBT friends and family.
- Talk openly and honestly with your GLBT loved ones about their lives.
- Find opportunities to talk openly with your straight friends about your GLBT friends and family and the issues that they face.
- Make sure that you include the same-sex partner of your GLBT loved one in events and activities just as you would any other friend’s spouse or significant other.
- Don’t allow anti-GLBT jokes or statements expressed in your presence to go unchallenged.
- Quietly demonstrate your open support by displaying an HRC or PFLAG bumper sticker, mug or poster, or similar items from other local or national organizations.
- Check the HRC Buyer’s Guide (www.hrc.org/buyersguide) for companies with strong equal rights policies — and then shop there.
- Visit the PFLAG website at www.pflag.org for information on local meetings and PFLAG public education programs across the country.
- Find out if your employer has an equal rights policy — and if not, encourage the organization’s leadership to adopt one.



- Many companies have employee resource groups (ERG) with policies that include GLBT employees. ERGs can be very helpful in giving you ways to show support at work.
- Research the views of candidates for public office and factor their stand on GLBT equality into your decision on who to vote for.
- Sign up online at www.hrc.org and at www.pflag.org to get updates on new developments.

There is also an extensive list of groups at the end of this guide that offer additional resources and ways to show your support.

These additional resources are available from PFLAG at www.pflag.org:

- Our Daughters and Sons — Questions & Answers for Parents of Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual People
- Nuestras hijas y nuestros hijos — Preguntas y repuestas para padres de gays, lesbianas y bisexuales
- Our Trans Children
- Nuestros/as Hijos/as Trans
- Opening the Straight Spouse's Closet — A Guide for Understanding Issues Facing Families with Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender Spouses
- Be Yourself — Questions & Answers for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Youth
- Faith in Our Families — Parents, Families and Friends Talk About Religion and Homosexuality

HRC also has a growing number of resources available at www.hrc.org:

- The HRC Resource Guide to Coming Out
- Buying for Equality: A Guide to Companies and Products That Support Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Equality
- Answers to Questions About Marriage Equality
- Living Openly in Your Place of Worship



GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender expression identity because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to help give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable.

bisexual – A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously; a bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary as sexual identity develops over time.

coming out – The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

gay – A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

gender expression – How a person behaves, appears or presents him- or herself with regard to societal expectations of gender.

gender identity – The gender role that a person claims for his or her self — which may or may not align with his or her physical gender.

genderqueer – A word people use to describe their own non-standard gender identity, or by those who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

GLBT – An acronym for “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.”

homophobia – The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people who love and are attracted to members of the same sex.

internalized homophobia – Self-identification of societal stereotypes by a GLBT person, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation or gender identity.

lesbian – A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women.

living openly – A state in which GLBT people are open with others about being GLBT how and when they choose to be.

outing – Exposing someone's sexual orientation as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender to others, usually without their permission; in essence “outing” them from the closet.

queer – A term that is inclusive of people who are not heterosexual. For many GLBT people, the word has a negative connotation; however, many younger GLBT people are comfortable using it.

same-gender loving – A term some prefer to use instead of “gay” or “lesbian” to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

sexual orientation – An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex orientation, opposite-sex orientation or a bisexual orientation.

sexual preference – What a person likes or prefers to do sexually; a conscious recognition or choice not to be confused with sexual orientation.

straight supporter – A person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic remarks and behaviors and explores and understands these forms of bias within him- or herself.

transgender – A term describing a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most people expect. It is an umbrella term that includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender non-conforming.

transphobia – the fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.

transsexual – A medical term describing people whose gender and sex do not line up, and who often seek medical treatment to bring their body and gender identity into alignment.



That person

in your life who opened up to you made a conscious choice to let you into his or her life. That is an act of trust. And in taking this step, that person has said that he or she wants your relationship to be based on truth.



MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT GLBT PEOPLE

It's important to remember that most of the negative stereotypes of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are based on erroneous or inadequate information. Here are some myths and facts to help you flesh out what's what:

It's a "choice." Sexual orientation and gender identity are not choices, any more than being left-handed or having brown eyes or being straight are choices. The choice is in deciding whether or not to live your life openly and honestly with yourself and others.

It's a "lifestyle." It's sometimes said that GLBT people live a gay "lifestyle." The problem with that word is that it can trivialize GLBT people and the struggles they face. Being GLBT is no more a lifestyle than being straight — it's a life, just like anyone else's.

Same-sex relationships don't last. Same-sex couples can, and do, form lasting, lifelong, committed relationships — just like any other couple. And just like any other couple, sometimes same-sex relationships end. The primary difference is that same-sex couples have few opportunities to marry or enter into civil unions or domestic partnerships.

GLBT people can't have families. According to the 2000 Census, more than 1 million children — probably many more — are being raised by same-sex couples nationwide. The American Psychological Association and other major medical and scientific researchers have stated that children of gay and lesbian parents are as mentally healthy as children raised by straight parents.

GLBT people aren't happy. In 1994, the American Medical Association released a statement saying, "Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men and lesbians around their sexual identity is not based on physiological causes but rather is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment." What that means is that the discrimination and stress that GLBT people face is the root cause of a great deal of pain for many GLBT people. That pain can be alleviated by knowing that there is a vibrant, growing community of GLBT and straight-supportive Americans who know and care about GLBT people and the issues they face.

GLBT people can "change" or be "cured." No scientifically valid evidence exists that shows that people can change their sexual orientation, although some people do repress it. The most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to change your sexual orientation as the process can actually be damaging.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



NATIONAL GLBT ORGANIZATIONS

American Veterans for Equal Rights

www.aver.us

Bisexual Resource Center

617-424-9595

www.biresource.org

Children of Lesbians and Gays Everywhere

415-861-5437

www.colage.org

Family Pride

202-331-5015

www.familypride.org

Gay Asian Pacific Support Network

213-368-6488

www.gapsn.org

Gay and Lesbian Medical Association

415-255-4547

www.glma.org

Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network

212-727-0135

www.glsen.org

GenderPAC

202-462-6610

www.gpac.org

Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation

212-629-3322

www.glaad.org

Gay and Lesbian Victory Fund

202-842-8679

www.victoryfund.org

Human Rights Campaign

202-628-4160

TTY 202-216-1572

www.hrc.org

Immigration Equality

www.immigrationequality.org

Lambda Legal

212-809-8585

www.lambdalegal.org

Matthew Shepard Foundation

307-237-6167

www.matthewshepard.org

National Assc. of LGBT Community Centers

202-639-6325

www.lgbtcenters.org

National Association of People with AIDS

202-898-0414

www.napwa.org

National Black Justice Coalition

www.nbjcoalition.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights

415-392-6257

www.nclrights.org

National Center for Transgender Equality

202-903-0112

www.NCTEquality.org

NGLTF

202-332-6483

www.thetaskforce.org

National Minority AIDS Council

202-483-6622

www.nmac.org

National Youth Advocacy Coalition

800-541-6922

www.nyacyouth.org

PFLAG

202-467-8180

www.pflag.org

SLDN

202-328-3244

www.sldn.org

Straight Spouse Network

510-595-1005

www.straightspouse.org



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

Affirmation (Mormon)

323-255-7251

www.affirmation.org

Affirmation

(United Methodist)

847-733-9590

www.umaffirm.org

Al-Fatiha Foundation

(Muslim)

202-319-0898

www.al-fatiha.net

Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists

508-226-1945

www.wabaptists.org

Dignity/USA (Catholic)

800-877-8797

www.dignityusa.org

Emergence International (Christian Scientist)

800-280-6653

www.emergence-international.org

Evangelicals Concerned with Reconciliation

206-621-8960

www.ecwr.org

Gay Buddhist Fellowship

415-974-9878

www.gaybuddhist.org

Integrity (Episcopalian)

202-462-9193

www.integrityusa.org

Lutherans Concerned

www.lcna.org

More Light Presbyterians

www.mlp.org

GLBT Concerns for Unitarian Universalists Association

617-948-6475

www.uua.org/obgltc

Rainbow Baptists

www.rainbowbaptists.org

SDA Kinship International (Seventh-Day Adventist)

866-732-5677

www.sdakinship.org

Soulforce

877-705-6393

www.soulforce.org

United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns

800-653-0799

www.ucccoalition.org

United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches

310-360-8640

www.ufmcc.com

Unity Fellowship Church Movement (African-American)

323-938-8322

www.unityfellowshipchurch.org

World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews

202-452-7424

www.glbtejews.org

HOTLINES

The Trevor Helpline

866-4-U-TREVOR

National Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline

800-347-TEEN (8336)

Gay and Lesbian National Hotline

888-843-GLNH (4564)

800-246-7743

CDC Information Line

800-342-AIDS (2437)

800-243-7889 (TTY)



A MESSAGE FROM HRC PRESIDENT JOE SOLMONESE

Dear Friends,

Thank you for taking time to read and think about HRC and PFLAG's A Straight Guide to GLBT Americans.



For me, coming out was initially a daunting process. Often times, it was hard for me to start the conversation, and even harder for the people I was telling to know what questions to ask or how to show support.

Ultimately, the people in my life — my family, friends, co-workers and acquaintances — and I all learned through time and practice that having those conversations and finding ways to be open, to ask questions and share our feelings were important steps to having honest, genuine relationships with one another.

This guide has been written to help straight people feel comfortable asking questions so that they can build understanding and, ultimately, support for the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people in their lives.

Some of you reading this guide will be taking one of your very first steps in learning about GLBT Americans, while others will have more experience and understanding. Please feel free to take the pieces that apply to you, and leave the rest behind. You may also want to explore the resources at the end of this guide for additional information.

This guide has also been designed to give many options for demonstrating your support in easy and convenient ways. We list these not to give a “hard push,” but rather to give you choices.

Wherever you are on your journey, the Human Rights Campaign and Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) are ready to help you on your path of understanding and support. Again, thank you and welcome.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joe Solmonese". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light grey circular background.

Joe Solmonese, HRC President



HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN
COMING OUT PROJECT

The HRC Coming Out Project is a program designed to help gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people come out and start living openly.

As coming out is a lifelong journey, the HRC Coming Out Project also helps GLBT people, as well as straight-supportive people, to live openly and talk about their support for equality at home, at work and in their communities each and every day.

In short, the HRC Coming Out Project's chief export into the world is open and respectful dialogue about the lives of GLBT Americans and their family and friends.

Visit www.hrc.org/comingout for more information.



Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) is the nation's foremost family-based organization committed to the civil rights of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender persons. Founded in 1973 by mothers and fathers, PFLAG has over 200,000 members and supporters in more than 500 chapters throughout the United States. To learn more, please visit www.pflag.org.

For more copies of this guide, please visit www.hrc.org.