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Looking Beyond



This brochure is also available in Chinese, Vietnamese, Tagalog, Japanese, and Korean.

**For Parents,
Family members
& Friends of
Asian Lesbians**

Keep in mind that how you choose to act or react to your child may have certain meanings for them. For example, they may find it easier to approach you if you seem to be open to new ideas. Alternately, if they sense that they will be punished for being honest, they may choose to talk to someone else instead. If you would like more support in going through these processes, get in touch GenerAsians Together. There are also answers to some commonly asked questions below -- read on!

My child was trying to tell me about his/her sexual orientation, but I just don't know how to handle the conversation. What should I do?

If your child was trying to disclose their sexual orientation to you, it probably means that you are important to them. It also means that they are looking for your support in this situation, so how you react will probably have a strong impact on your child.

The most important thing you can do is to respect your child's decision to tell you. So, let them do most of the talking, and hear them out. You will likely have many questions for them, and for yourself. Try to gain a better understanding of their point of view. Remember, your child is still the same person. They haven't changed, it's only what you know about them that has changed.

We know that coming to terms with your child's sexual orientation can be a lengthy process, with many opposing emotions and thoughts. Please get in touch with GenerAsians Together; our parents and family members who have gone through similar experiences are eager to provide support.

Introduction

GenerAsians Together is a social support group for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Queer (lesbigay) people and their family and friends, in East and Southeast Asian communities.

We work together to promote happier and healthier relationships between gay, lesbian, bisexual, and queer people and their parents, family, and friends.

This booklet is dedicated to parents and family members who are dealing with their child's coming out process, or preparing for the process. If you have further questions, or would like more support, please contact us. We are eager to hear from you.

What should I do if I suspect my child is attracted to people of the same sex?

It probably takes a lot of courage for you to ask yourself this question. Before you go about looking for answers, it's important to ask yourself, why is it you want to know? What would it mean to you if your child is lesbigay? And why do you feel a need to do something at this point? What is your motivation?

Ask yourself, are you comfortable with talking to your child about sexuality? If you feel interested and comfortable in approaching your child about this, do you think they are ready to talk to you about it too? And, what would you do if your child told you that they are lesbigay?

difficult and even more puzzling, since there is no recognized causes of homosexuality or heterosexuality.

"Parents want their children to excel, to stand out. But not in a way which the majority of society would not applaud. It is sometimes hard for me to separate my feelings about my gay son, and my feelings about other people's feelings about him being gay."

One way that some parents deal with these feelings is to focus on exploring why and how they see their child's sexuality as a problem. They often discover that cultural values, societal discrimination against lesbian people, negative portrayal of lesbian people in the media, religious beliefs, and the plain unfamiliarity with the subject play a bigger role in their discomfort than they expected.

What will other people think? How do I face family and friends?

Firstly, ask yourself, why am I so fearful or concerned?, and try to identify what it is you are really dreading. Your child may be able to give you some support in this area, as they have probably experienced emotions similar to the ones you are now going through.

The anticipation about telling others about your child's sexual orientation can be overwhelming. Are you concerned about what others feel or think? Do you anticipate judgment, or damage to your reputation? Take time to think about how you feel and how others would really react. For many parents, it is very difficult and takes a lot

Did I do something wrong?

Many parents ask this question when they first find out that their child is attracted to people of the same sex.

There are really two parts to this question. Firstly, that lesbian sexual orientation feels wrong or unnatural. Secondly, that a child's upbringing "causes" them to be lesbian.

The idea of love between people of the same sex feels unnatural or wrong to many people. Some people feel this way as a result of conscious moral judgements, or of cultural and religious teachings. Some people feel this way because they have been given very little information about people who are attracted to others of the same sex. And often, the information we receive is negative and/or inaccurate. This is why GenerAsians Together is here. If you feel that other people's experiences and perspectives would be useful to you, please take a look at the anecdotes at the end of each question, and make use of the resource list at the back of this booklet. Often, feelings of discomfort change when understanding increases.

"Nobody ever asks what causes heterosexuality. When people ask me why I'm queer, I feel so offended because they are assuming that heterosexuality is the default, and that I somehow veered away from it."

You are not alone if you are feeling guilty or responsible somehow for your child's sexual orientation. Many parents focus on finding the "cause" of their child's sexuality because they see it as a problem. For many parents, searching for a definite cause of sexuality is very

I want grandchildren. Will my lesbigay child have children?

Having children is becoming less of an obligation and more of a choice for people nowadays, be they heterosexual or not. Despite systemic barriers, many people are choosing to have children with their same-sex partners. Alternative insemination, surrogate parenthood, co-parenting, adoption, and raising children from previous relationships are some options for lesbigay people.

"My partner and I are planning on having a child together. We are going to impregnate her alternatively, with my egg and her brother's sperm. She and her brother look so alike! Hopefully, the child will look like both of us."

If your child chooses not to have children of their own, you may feel angry or disappointed that the family name or heritage will not be carried on. The issue is just as complicated for many lesbigay people, who fear letting their parents and family down.

"I'm not going to have a child with or without a partner. I don't think I could afford it, and I'm not good with kids anyway. Sometimes I think about having a child though, because I know my mother is so disappointed. She wants a grandson."

Your child's choice to remain childless impacts you, though they probably do not make that decision to deliberately hurt you.

"I think it's important to be selective about who I tell. Sometimes I'm just not ready or willing to deal with their reactions."

of courage to tell others, even if they themselves are accepting of their child's sexual orientation. Chances are, some people's reactions will be positive, and some negative.

When you consider telling others, it is important to know that you have some control about who to tell, how to tell, and when to tell. You can also talk to your child about their comfort levels and coming out strategies too. After all, they have to contemplate these issues almost constantly. Some parents find it helpful to share their story with, and hear stories of other parents with lesbigay children. Consider attending a GenerAsians Together gathering or potluck, you may find someone who speak the same first language or have the same background as you!

"Years ago, I told my mom how I was ashamed of her picking me up from school because she's Vietnamese. Then I realized that I hurt her a lot. I now realize that I wasn't ashamed her, but the discrimination against Vietnamese people made it hard for me to show just how proud of her I was. I think this is like what she's going through with the fact that I'm a lesbian, and that most people don't like lesbians."

Are lesbigay people more promiscuous than heterosexual people?

Many people focus on or highlight sexual activities as the only part of lesbigay people's lives. However, we should also look at the various aspects of a person's life, such as personality, family relationships, professional or academic accomplishments, romantic relationships.

The general perspective of sexual relations varies a lot from culture to culture. You may have grown up in a time and place where people usually married the first or second lover they have had. Whereas, at this time in North America, it is quite common for young people to have many lovers, regardless of their sexual orientation.

So, if you are feeling concern or disapproval for your child's sex life, there may be other factors involved beside the fact that they are attracted to people of the same sex. Many Asian parents in North America today are coping with similar anxieties about the cultural and value differences they see in their children.

"People have sexual desires, straight people do, gay people do. I don't know why the fact that I like people of the same sex would affect how many partners I'm going to have in my life."

Will my child get AIDS because they are lesbigay?

No. AIDS is caused by the virus called HIV, and HIV infects men and women of all sexual orientations (heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and so on) and backgrounds. HIV is passed on from an infected person to someone else through body fluids like blood, vaginal fluids, and semen. So, whether someone gets infected or not depends only on what they do, and not what their sexual orientation is.

You may have heard from various sources, like television, newspaper, friends and family, and so on, that being lesbigay and having AIDS is linked. This is not true. Discrimination against lesbigay people and against people living with HIV/AIDS created and fuels this myth.

If you would like more information, call or visit the Asian Community AIDS Services (416) 963-4300 in Toronto.

"When I first came out as a lesbian, I thought I was going to get AIDS because a teacher at school said that lesbians and gays get AIDS. I trusted him at first because teachers are supposed to be right. But he was wrong."

Will my child or my family be discriminated against?

The Canadian Charter of Rights prohibits discrimination based on sexual orientation, which means that it is a violation of human rights to deny service, employment opportunities, benefits, and other treatment to someone because they are lesbian/gay. Although the Charter has little weight on everyday interactions, it may be comforting for you to know rights that you and your child have.

Racism still exists despite the Charter outlawing discrimination based on race or cultural background.

"When my father asked me to bring my boyfriend home for dinner on New Year's Eve, I was so touched. It was his way of showing me he's trying to love me. I know it took months of thinking and working things out on his part."

"Many relatives ask me when my daughter is going to get married. At first I wasn't sure what to say to them, I just made excuses. But recently, I feel more okay to say that she's a lesbian and that I don't think she wants to get married."

Similarly, lesbian/gay people and their families often experience hatred or fear of them. This hatred and fear is together referred to as "homophobia".

Homophobia exists in many forms, and can range from jokes that demean lesbian/gay people, to denying someone their right to visit a same-sex partner in the hospital. Some parents and lesbian/gay people themselves feel helpless in combating the

Do lesbian/gay people have meaningful relationships?

Yes. You may be concerned that your child will be alone or lonely. This may be because the general public have seen very few role models of same-sex couples. In fact, many people have meaningful and fulfilling relationships with same-sex partners. It is widely recognized that loving relationships have little to do with gender of the partners.

Some people believe that women and men complement each other, that people of each sex is incomplete without the other. Many parents find it helpful to see same-sex couples in loving relationships and to hear their stories. This is why GenerAsians Together strives to bring together parents and lesbian/gay children.

"My partner and I have been together for 11 years. I fell in love with him when I was 27, and we are very compatible."

Some parents are concerned about their lesbian/gay child's relationships. A parent's love and support, as well as the community's and society's support are very important in maintaining any relationship. Therefore, if a couple cannot feel safe to express their affection for each other, or if they must constantly be in "hiding", it is more difficult for them to maintain a strong relationship.

"When I first realized I was queer, I longed to see women couples because I'd never seen them before. At first, it was strange even for me to look at women holding hands, but I think I was just not used to it."

Therefore, including your lesbian/gay child and their partner in family functions may be an important validation to them.

GenerAsians Together is a project sponsored by the
Asian Community AIDS Services.



Asian Community AIDS Services (ACAS)
provides HIV/AIDS education and support to the
East and Southeast Asian communities.
For information on HIV/AIDS prevention,
STDs and sexual health, counselling and support,
please call ACAS at:
(416) 963-4300

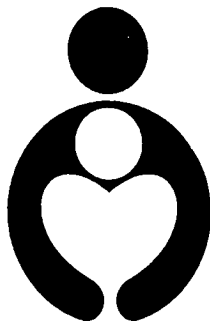
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discrimination. However, it may be empowering to realize that incidents of homophobia can be challenged. Many parents show their support to their lesbian children by challenging homophobia when and where they are comfortable.

Resources

GenerAsians Together (GT)	(416)963-4300 ext.55
Gay Asians Toronto (GAT)	(416) 961-8239
Queer Asian Youth Social Group	(416) 963-4300 ext 29, 26
Asian Community AIDS Service	(416) 963-4300
Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) Toronto	(416) 406-1727
519 Church Street Community Center	(416) 392-6874
Toronto District School Board, Human Sexuality Program (Triangle Program)	(416) 397-3755
Christos M.C.C.	(416) 925-7924
Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto (MCC)	(416) 406-6229
Meal Trans Program	(416) 392-6874
Family Services Associations of Toronto	(416) 438-3697

Do you have any questions this booklet doesn't address? Please get in touch with us at GenerAsians Together; we would like to offer our support and assistance.