

DEAR FAMILY:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FAMILIES OF LGBTQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE

Across the interviews, LGBTQ+ youth expressed a desire for parents & caregivers to spend time reflecting on their own "gender and sexuality stories," to think about when and how they learned about gender and sexuality growing up, and how it connects to how they feel about gender and sexuality now. Exploring and uncovering the social and cultural messages we were taught, and maybe still hold - messages of guilt, shame, rejection, or respect, love, and acceptance - can help parents & caregivers form new understandings and stronger relationships with their kids.

- Educate yourself. Be wary of myths and simplified statistics. Dig deeper & diversify the places where you're gathering info! The young person (or people) who identify as LGBTQ+ and/or gender expansive in your family should not be your only source of info about queer life!
- Practice using words that might be new to you and/or make you uncomfortable, like "queer" "lesbian" "trans" "pronouns" etc. Saying these and other words aloud & publicly can help young people feel affirmed.
- Ask for pronoun preferences and commit to using the right pronouns. If you slip-up or make a mistake, just apologize, correct yourself, and try to do better next time. Don't make it a big deal and go on about how hard you are trying or how difficult it is.
- Don't underestimate how significant a part of someone's identity being LGBTQ+/GE is.
- If a young LGBTQ+/GE person is out to you, get to know them in their full uniqueness. Just because someone identifies a certain way, doesn't mean they can or want to speak for other people who identify the same way. Don't compare the queer young person in your life to every other queer young person you meet or see in movie. Instead, you can ask in what ways this story does or does not reflect their experiences of being queer.
- Reflect on your intentions AND acknowledge your impact. Even if you think you're doing something supportive, it may have a hurtful impact you didn't intend. It's ok not to know everything all at once. Be honest when you don't know something!
- Watch and enjoy representations of LGBTQ+ and gender expansive people in movies and tv shows with the young person/people in your family.
- LISTEN, keep an open mind, and communicate. Ask LGBTQ+/GE young people in your family what their dreams are, what's challenging, and what would help them.
- Challenge yourself to learn about and dismantle cisnormativity (the assumption that a person's gender identity matches their biological sex and that the gender binary is the norm) and heteronormativity (the belief that heterosexuality is the norm or default sexual orientation).
- Ask about coming out. For a lot young people, coming out is a process, not a one-time event. Communicate with the young people in your family about who they are out to, who they want to be out to but aren't yet, what's challenging about coming out, and what's rewarding.
- Love and enjoy your LGBTQ+/GE young person for being exactly who they are!