

So...

*you think
your child is*

GAY



ANSWERS

to some of the

QUESTIONS

you may have.

I have inklings that my child might be gay, but...

HOW CAN I BE SURE?

Until your son or daughter comes and tells you that they are, or might be, gay or bisexual, you can't know. Just like straight people, gay people come in all shapes and sizes. So don't make assumptions.

Steer clear of prying though; you want them to come and tell you in their own time. If you try and pressure them, it'll probably make them close up - the opposite of what you want.

What you can do is create an environment where your son or daughter feels able to tell you they're gay, knowing you'll be supportive.

Remember...

...the more confident your son or daughter is that you'll be OK with them talking to you about it, the more likely it is that they'll think it's OK to tell you.

For example, say positive things about gay people when they're on TV and don't allow people to say negative things about gay people under your roof. If your child is - or thinks they might be - gay, they'll probably be very alert to attitudes about gay people in your home.

How can they be sure it isn't just a **PHASE?**

We all know that growing up is confusing, particularly where feelings are concerned. Some young people might take a long time to come to terms with being gay; others will be clear about it very quickly. Sometimes someone goes out with someone of the same sex but may not be sure they're gay. Some young people may be bisexual. This means they're attracted to both sexes. This is not a phase on the way to becoming 'fully gay'. Let them define themselves.

If your son or daughter does tell you they're gay, they'll have plucked up a lot of courage to do so.

Dismissing it as a phase will make it seem like you're not taking them seriously and undermine their confidence, which

will make them less likely to open up to you in future. If they tell you they're gay, you've got to take their word for it.

Did I do something wrong?

ABSOLUTELY

NOT.

There is no link between ways of parenting or a young person's experiences and the likelihood of being gay.

Joe Bloggs, with 2 parents, 1.4 siblings and a dog who grew up in suburbia is just as likely to be gay as Jack Smith with a pushy mother and an absent father who grew up in central Manchester.

Gay people grow up in all sorts of families and come from all sorts of backgrounds and there's nothing you could have done to influence it.

You can influence how likely your son or daughter is to tell you about it, and how they feel about it, by creating the sort of environment where they think they can.

BUT

I don't agree with it.

(Or at least some of my family don't)

The truth is, if you've got a problem with the idea of your child being gay, you're going to have to live with it and accept it.

The best thing you can do is to put your feelings about 'being gay' to one side and remember that, regardless of your son or daughter's sexuality, you love them and want them to be happy. The fact that they are gay or lesbian doesn't change that.

There's no way to 'turn them straight'. If you reject it, all you'll do is damage your relationship with your child, hurting you and them. Rejecting it also denies you the opportunity to share in a really important part of their life.

As for your relatives, some family members, particularly older relatives, might need some help getting their heads around the issue (although older people are often a lot more accepting than we give them credit for). If they don't react well initially, put some rules in place and establish what can and can't be said in front of your children. It's not always easy, but often, it is.

I don't like their partner!

It's perfectly natural for any parent not to be too keen on their son or daughter's first girlfriend or boyfriend. But that's nothing to do with their sexuality.

If you don't like your son or daughter's partner, the first thing to consider is whether it might be worth taking a step back; if you try and stop them seeing one another you could end up encouraging them. Chances are it won't last that long anyway. But if you do decide to intervene, make it clear that you're not reacting like this because of the gay thing or the gender of their partner, but because of problems you have with their partner as a person.

Talking about it is a good thing.

One thing you can do is give them the information that they need to approach relationships and sex responsibly. Gay and lesbian young people often lack access to information about sex and staying safe so, even if you feel like you can't talk about it personally, you should at least be able to point them in the direction of the information they need. For all the awkwardness these conversations bring, the evidence shows that young people who can talk to their parents tend to delay sex until later and to have sex safely.

Are they going to be bullied in school?

Schools have transformed over the past few years and they're now better places to be gay than they have ever been. But of course it's still not perfect.

Good teachers know that stamping out homophobic bullying is an important part of their job in creating a safe school environment, where all young people can realise their potential.

Still, growing up different can be difficult for any young person, because they're gay or lesbian or because of anything else that makes them stand out.

That's why it's so important that they feel they can come and talk to you about these things. Bullying makes school miserable and so

if they're being bullied you want to know about it. If the school hasn't yet taken the right steps to stop it, that's where you can step in.

DOES THIS MEAN I'M NOT GOING TO HAVE GRANDCHILDREN?

Recent changes in the law have made it much easier for gay people to have children.

Gay couples now have the same right to adopt and access fertility services as straight people. There are already almost 10,000 same-sex parent families raising children.

Same-sex couples will have to do a little more planning and research into having children than most straight couples, but organisations such as Stonewall have published guides on the options available to gay couples on having children.

The bottom line is that being gay is no barrier to having children, if that's what your son or daughter wants.

Will we still be welcome at

CHURCH?

All religions have gay believers and all religions have groups for gay believers.

With a bit of research you should be able to find a place of worship where your family can feel welcome. Until you know for sure, protect them from anti-gay sentiment and try to balance out any opinions they might hear in your place of worship.

All religions and places of worship are different and reflect the views of the specific community they serve.

In some cases certain churches, temples, synagogues or mosques might hold anti-gay views. But that doesn't mean the whole of your religion is anti-gay.

Won't being gay make their life **HARDER** for them?

What makes life hard for gay people is people rejecting them.

And that's even harder if it's their parents. But attitudes to gay people have transformed in recent years. New laws have made our country fairer and more equal. There are more gay role models in the arts, politics and sport and those people who have a problem with gay people are an increasingly small minority.

In the world of work, companies not only follow strict equality laws to protect gay and lesbian people's rights, but they know that people work best when they can be themselves and want a workforce that reflects their client base. Of course discrimination still exists and that's why organisations like **Stonewall** continue to work with Government and employers to stamp it out.

As with all young people, it's important your son or daughter knows about practising safer sex and being responsible and you're going to have to provide a shoulder to cry on

occasionally and make sure they're not taking risks online. But in modern Britain, gay young people can grow up, live happy lives and fall in love with people just like anyone else.

So, what do I say?

"I love you."

For further advice and support please contact
08000 502020 or info@stonewall.org.uk

"How can I be sure?"

"Did I do something wrong?"

*"Does this mean I'm not going to
have grandchildren?"*

"Will we still be welcome at
church?"

"What do I say?"



Stonewall