

# IF I COME OUT TO YOU...

This document has been adapted from three primary sources: Laurie Krieg, "10 Things I Wish Every Christian Leader Knew about Gay Teens in Their Church," Pastoral Paper 8, The Center for Faith, Sexuality & Gender ([centerforfaith.com](http://centerforfaith.com)); Caleb Kaltenbach, *Messy Grace: How a Pastor with Gay Parents Learned to Love Others Without Sacrificing Convictions*; and Bill Henson, *Guiding Families of LGBT+ Loved Ones*, Expanded Edition.

1. **Thank the person—sincerely.** The first words that come out of your mouth really need to be "Thank you." "Thank you for sharing this part of your life with me." "Thank you for trusting me with something that's so precious and important. That must have been really difficult to do." It takes a tremendous amount of courage for friends and family members to share this part of life with you. They're risking rejection and misunderstanding. They are risking the relationship itself.
2. **Reaffirm your care and love.** "I don't see you any differently. I love you the same as I did five minutes ago." "Mom and Dad love you. We will always love you. We are so thankful you told us. You are so courageous. We are going to walk with you no matter what. This is your home—always! We are your family—always! We really want to hear your whole story." "I want our relationship to be a safe place where you can tell me anything."
3. **Don't say, "I thought so," or even, "I never guessed it."** It makes the person feel like they are either a walking stereotype or a minority of a minority (by a 'minority of a minority,' I mean they may think, 'I don't look gay, but I am gay.').
4. **Don't compare.** Many Christians, in an attempt to offer compassion, have said to someone who comes out to them, "I don't think being gay is any worse than the sin or murder, theft, adultery," and so on. While this is true theologically, it's very unhelpful. Nobody wins in comparison. The person who has just come out to you thinks, "Okay, so you just compared me to Hannibal Lecter, or other shady characters."
5. **Ask if it's okay for you to ask some questions.** "Can I ask you more about your experience? Feel free to not answer anything you don't want to."
6. **Ask questions because you are genuinely curious.** "I really would love to know, what has it been like for you wrestling through all of this?"
7. **Ask how they identify.** "Would you mind telling me what words you use to describe yourself? Where are you at in this process? How would you like to be addressed?"

8. **If you're in a panic about what to say, restate what they just said.** “It sounds like you are saying...” Listen for feeling words. “It sounds like it has been really painful to talk with your old friends at school.” This is one way of helping them know that they are heard.
9. **Ask what their support system is like.** “With whom have you shared? What has that been like for you?” It is critical that LGBTQ+ youth and young adults build an effective support system (Jesus, parents, other immediate family, other relatives, counselors, pastors, social services, mentors, peers, family of God). Studies have shown a 40%–60% reduction in suicidality when one adult will call a trans\* teen by their chosen name, pronoun. However, this is not the moment to try to “fix” anyone. Now is not the time to suggest counseling. This is the moment to be a good friend, parent, sibling, or whatever your role may be with the other person.
10. **Ask the child how they feel about themselves.** Your listening for signs of self-hatred and potential self-harm. Safety is the highest priority based on statistics of LGBTQ teen suicide and harm. After all this, how do you feel about yourself?” (Get help if it seems they are a danger to themselves or others.)
11. **Ask the child how you can support them.** “I’d love to come alongside you any way I can. How can I support you in this season?” (Then do it. Keep your word!)
12. **Hug them (but ask first).** “Would it be okay if I hugged you?”

### **Follow-Up Conversation**

Even if you respond well, you may (or likely) will feel shock, sadness, discomfort, or grief. It’s important to not let those negative feelings result in a growing silence that lowers family connection. This silence can convey to your child that you are not happy with them. Healthy conversation that values our children/friends is essential. Avoid two extremes: allowing silence to cut off any further dialogue, and constantly talking about your child’s/friend’s gender/sexuality.