

DATINGMATTERS®

STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE HEALTHY TEEN RELATIONSHIPS

A GUIDE TO HEALTHY, SAFE RELATIONSHIPS FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH

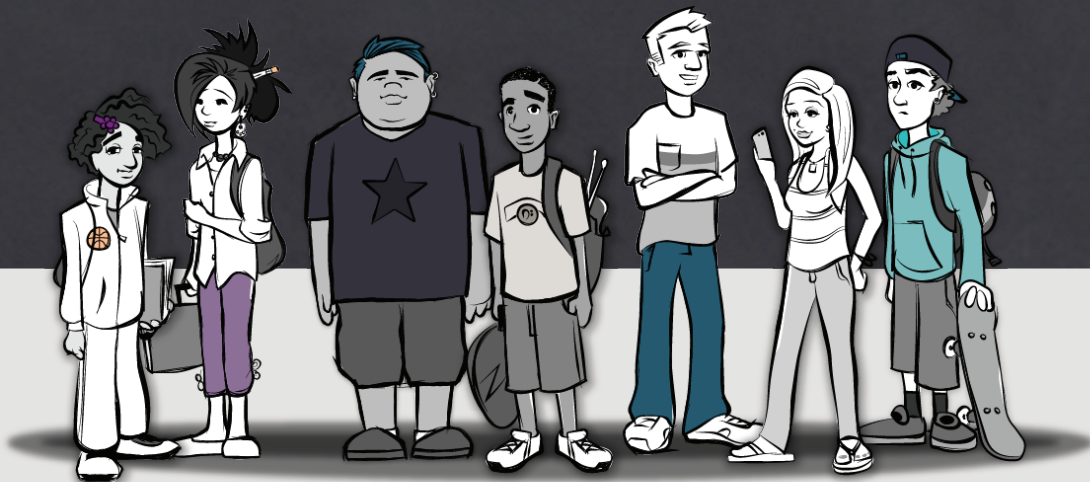


Table of Contents

Introduction	3
Healthy Relationships	4
Healthy Communication Skills	6
Unhealthy Relationships	7
Red–Yellow–Green Light Activity	8
Ending Unhealthy or Unsafe Relationships	11
Where and How to Seek Help	12
Coming Out	13
Thinking About Coming Out	13
Preparing for the Conversation	14
Having the Conversation	15
Preparing for Different Reactions	18
References and Notes	20
Appendix 1: Resources	21
Appendix 2: Glossary	25
Appendix 3: The Genderbread Person	27

INTRODUCTION

This guide is a supplement to Dating Matters®¹—a comprehensive prevention model delivered in schools and communities that teaches skills to help young people have healthy, safe relationships both now and in the future. Although it is called Dating Matters, the program talks about all kinds of relationships, including those with family members and friends. This guide focuses on relationships among lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ+) youth. It is full of activities and important information about healthy, safe relationships. It will remind you how to keep relationships healthy and fun. It will also be a helpful guide if you or a friend have questions or are wondering what to do about an unhealthy or unsafe relationship.

Everyone deserves safe and healthy relationships no matter who you love or how you identify. Everyone can benefit from learning what a healthy relationship looks like and practicing the skills needed to have strong relationships. This might mean learning how to resolve conflicts with respect or having open, honest communication with a partner. You might have already learned some of these skills if you participated in Dating Matters!

LGBTQ+ youth may experience unique challenges and opportunities in their relationships. Learning more about those needs and experiences can help LGBTQ+ youth have safe and healthy relationships. If you know you are LGBTQ+ or are questioning if you might be, this guide is for you. This guide can also help you support friends, family, and classmates who are LGBTQ+.

THIS GUIDE WILL DISCUSS THE FOLLOWING IMPORTANT TOPICS:

- Characteristics and behaviors of healthy and unhealthy relationships
- How to seek help if you or a friend leaves an unhealthy relationship
- The coming out process (such as how to approach the conversation and prepare for different reactions)



HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

WHAT DO HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS LOOK LIKE?

If you have participated in Dating Matters, you have already learned a lot about healthy relationships. Healthy relationships are important for everyone, including LGBTQ+ youth! The percentage of LGBTQ+ youth in dating relationships is similar to that of non-LGBTQ+ youth.²

People in LGBTQ+ relationships and non-LGBTQ+ relationships alike deserve safe and healthy dating relationships. In this guide, we use the term “LGBTQ+ relationships” to include different types of dating relationships. It includes relationships in which all partners identify as LGBTQ+, such as a relationship between two girls who identify as lesbian. It also includes relationships in which only one partner identifies as LGBTQ+, such as a relationship between a transgender woman and a cisgender man or a relationship between a bisexual man and a straight woman.

Key Traits of Healthy Relationships

Listen to each other	Care about each other	Are patient with each other	Can disagree without hurting each other
Communicate in a healthy way	Trust each other	Make each other laugh	Do things both together and alone or with other people
Are dependable	Support each other	Make decisions together and treat each other as equals	Respect things that are important to each person
Have fun together	Help each other solve problems	Try to understand each other's feelings	Are honest with each other

FOR LGBTQ+ YOUTH, A HEALTHY RELATIONSHIP (OF ANY TYPE) HAS THE TRAITS ABOVE AND THE OTHER PERSON:

- Respects your name and pronouns
- Supports your gender identity, sexual orientation, and expression
- Respects your choices about intimacy
- Never threatens to out you to people
- Is comfortable talking about boundaries
- Does not judge you based on their religious or political beliefs
- Is respectful of how your sexual orientation and gender identity develop over time

CELEBRATE LGBTQ+

People who identify as LGBTQ+ celebrate their community at certain times throughout the year.

- **June** is LGBTQ+ Pride Month marked by parades and other celebrations throughout the U.S.
- **October** is LGBT History Month when we recognize lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender history, and the history of the gay rights and related civil rights movements. This month includes National Coming Out Day on **October 11**.
- **March 31** is Transgender Day of Visibility, **April 26** is Lesbian Visibility Day, and **September 23** is Celebrate Bisexuality Day. Each of these days celebrate people who identify as LGBTQ+ and raise awareness of discrimination faced.



ACTIVITY

Can you think of some good LGBTQ+ relationship role models? What key traits from the Dating Matters sessions and the list above do you see in them? These role models don't have to be people you personally know. They might be famous couples in books, on TV, or a person with an LGBTQ+ spouse or partner.

LGBTQ+ Relationship Role Models	Traits of Healthy Relationships They Show

HEALTHY COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Those of you who completed Dating Matters are familiar with healthy communication skills. In Dating Matters we discuss two ways to communicate – nonverbal and verbal. The table below provides examples of healthy communication skills you can use in your relationships. We will refer to these examples throughout this guide.

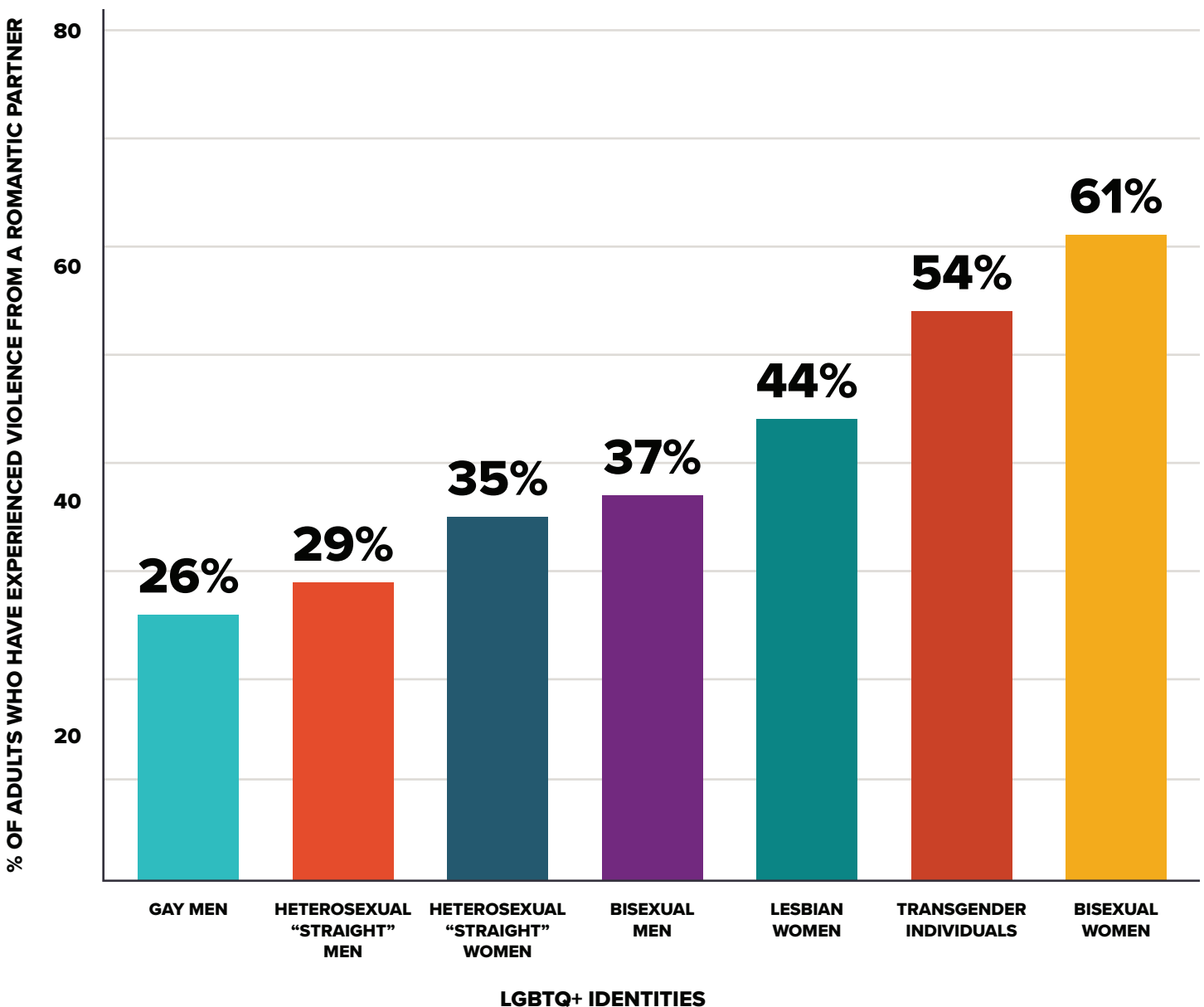
Nonverbal Skills	
Stay in control of your feelings	<p>Use the four steps to stay in control of your feelings:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Notice what your body is telling you. Then PAUSE! 2. Name your feeling 3. Pick the best way to calm down (and do it!) 4. Check in
Make eye contact	Eye contact shows that you are listening and appreciate what the other person has to say.
Watch your facial expressions and body language	Your body and face are sending a message too! What is happening with your body and your face says as much about what you are saying as what comes out of your mouth.
Verbal Skills	
Watch your tone of voice	If you raise your voice or use a sarcastic tone, others may be less likely to listen to you.
Listen actively	<p>Make sure you understand what is being said. Try rephrasing what has been said: “It sounds like you are saying...”</p> <p>Take turns talking.</p> <p>Ask questions about what is being said and how the other person feels.</p> <p>Do not jump to conclusions. After listening to the other person’s answers, you may realize that the disagreement (if there is one) was all a misunderstanding.</p>

UNHEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

Unlike their peers, LGBTQ+ youth often do not grow up in households with parents who share their gender identity or sexual orientation. Because of this, they may not have the chance to see examples of how to deal with challenges like stigma or discrimination while growing up. Also, LGBTQ+ youth do not often have many examples of LGBTQ+ adult couples to look up to.

Anyone can experience abuse in their relationships, and people who identify as LGBTQ+ are no different. Relationship abuse happens in LGBTQ+ relationships as often as in non-LGBTQ+ relationships.^{3,4} Abuse can happen in person or virtually. Abuse that takes place on social media, online, or through texting is called cyberbullying. LGBTQ+ youth may be at increased risk of cyberbullying, including in their dating relationships.⁵ Stigma and discrimination toward people who identify as LGBTQ+ can also contribute to relationship abuse.^{3,6}

LGBTQ+ PEOPLE ARE MORE LIKELY TO BE VICTIMS OF VIOLENCE FROM A ROMANTIC PARTNER^{4,7}



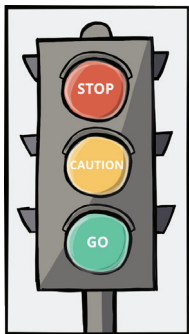
RED–YELLOW–GREEN LIGHT ACTIVITY

This activity is called “**Red – Yellow – Green Light.**” It helps you think more about the difference between healthy, unhealthy, and unsafe behaviors. This activity may look familiar if you have already completed Dating Matters.

Dating Matters uses the red, yellow, and green light system to help you think about the range of behaviors seen in relationships.

- **Green light** behaviors are things people do and ways people treat each other that are healthy.
- **Yellow light** behaviors are unhealthy and worrisome. You may need to communicate your needs and concerns clearly or talk to a trusted adult to ensure you are safe and respected in the relationship.
- **Red light** behaviors are not only unhealthy but also unsafe. These situations may cause physical, sexual, or emotional harm. Teen dating violence happens when unhealthy relationship behaviors cross the line and become unsafe.

Sometimes there is a clear difference between unhealthy and unsafe behaviors. Other times, it may be hard to decide if someone’s behavior is unhealthy or if it has become unsafe. The table below includes example scenarios that may occur in LGBTQ+ relationships.



Red: STOP! Get help!

This behavior has crossed the line and is unsafe.

Yellow: Use caution.

This behavior is unhealthy and worrisome. You could try using healthy communication skills or talking to a trusted adult.

Green: Go!




Keep up this healthy behavior.

INSTRUCTIONS


Read each statement in the table below and decide whether the statement is a **red, yellow** or **green** light. Once you are done, you can read the answers and explanations below the table.

Behaviors	● ● ●
1. My friend asked me to attend a Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) meeting.	
2. My girlfriend wants to hide our relationship from her family.	
3. A classmate threatened to “out” me at school.	
4. My girlfriend encourages me to do things with my friends.	
5. My boyfriend often says that I am not bisexual because I’m dating a straight guy. Even though he is joking, it makes me feel like he doesn’t take my identity seriously.	
6. My partner was upset with me and threatened to share photos of us with their friends that would “out” me.	


RED-YELLOW-GREEN LIGHT ACTIVITY, CONT.

Behaviors	  
7. My partner asked me to practice a “coming out” conversation with them before they come out to their parents.	
8. My girlfriend and I broke up last week. She was upset about the breakup and told her friends about the chest binder I wear to feel more comfortable in my body.	
9. When my friend and I go shopping, they always want me to try on dresses when they know I don’t like wearing those types of clothes.	
10. I am uncomfortable with how my boyfriend has been pressuring me to be physically intimate.	
11. My partner is pressuring me to be “out” to others.	
12. I recently came out as nonbinary and my partner refuses to use my gender pronouns of “they/them.”	
13. My boyfriend asked me how we will prevent sexually transmitted diseases (STDs), like getting tested for STDs and using a condom.	
14. My boyfriend makes fun of me for being too feminine.	


1. My friend asked me to attend a Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA) meeting.

 **Green light.** This is an example of supporting your friends. In healthy relationships, we take part in activities our friends enjoy or that are important to them.


2. My girlfriend wants to hide our relationship from her family.

 **Yellow light.** Try using healthy communication skills to express your feelings and thoughts. Ask why your partner wants to hide the relationship and share your feelings. This can be hard if one person is comfortable with being open about the relationship, but the other is not. It is okay to walk away if you and your partner are not on the same page about the direction of the relationship. If it’s important to you to be in a relationship where you can be out to family and friends, that can be a reason to end the relationship.


3. A classmate threatened to “out” me at school.

 **Red light.** Threats like these are an example of emotional violence. Reach out to a parent or other trusted adult (e.g., school counselor) for guidance.

4. My girlfriend encourages me to do things with my friends.

 **Green light.** In healthy relationships, it is important to spend time apart with friends or by yourself. Spending time apart can build trust and strengthen a relationship.

5. My boyfriend often says that I am not bisexual because I’m dating a straight guy. Even though he is joking, it makes me feel like he doesn’t take my identity seriously.

 **Yellow or Red light.** While having fun with each other is a key part of a healthy relationship, tell your boyfriend that these comments are hurtful. Use healthy communication skills like “I” statements to talk with him. If the behavior continues, you should decide if the relationship is becoming unhealthy and needs to end.

RED-YELLOW-GREEN LIGHT ACTIVITY, CONT.

6. My partner was upset with me and threatened to share photos of us with their friends that would “out” me.
- **Red light.** No one has the right to “out” you to anyone without your permission, even if you’re out to others. Instead, focus on your emotional well-being and physical safety. If you ever feel like your safety might be at risk, or just need someone safe to talk to, head to the end of this guide for some helpful resources.
7. My partner asked me to practice a “coming out” conversation with them before they come out to their parents.
- **Green light.** Being dependable and helping each other navigate challenges is a big part of healthy relationships.
8. My girlfriend and I broke up last week. She was upset about it and told her friends about the chest binder I wear to feel more comfortable in my body.
- **Red light.** This is another example of emotional violence. No one should share personal information about you with others without your consent. Tell a parent, trusted adult, health provider, or friend what you’re going through so they can help.
9. When my friend and I go shopping, they always want me to try on dresses when they know I don’t like wearing those types of clothes.
- **Yellow or Red light.** Talk with your friend and let them know how this makes you feel. If your friend continues this behavior, they are crossing the line to a red light behavior.
10. I am uncomfortable with how my boyfriend has been pressuring me to be physically intimate.
- **Red light.** No one should ever feel forced or pressured to do anything sexual, no matter how you identify, or what else has happened in the relationship or in other relationships.
11. My partner is pressuring me to be “out” to others.
- **Yellow light.** Although your partner may have good intentions, only you can decide when and how you come out to a person. You should not feel pressured into it. While it is important to support one another, it is also important to listen to your partner. If you tell your partner that you’re not ready to come out and they continue to pressure you, that may be a sign of an unhealthy relationship.
12. I recently came out as nonbinary and my partner refuses to use my gender pronouns of “they/them.”
- **Red light.** You should use healthy communication skills to let your partner know how you feel. If the behavior continues after talking, or they refuse to respect other aspects of your identity, think about if you should end the relationship.
13. My boyfriend asked me how we will prevent STDs, like getting tested for STDs and using a condom.
- **Green light.** Discussions that avoid pressure to have sex and talk about how to stay safe from STDs including HIV are an important part of a healthy relationship. Your boyfriend bringing this up to you indicates that they care about your sexual health.
14. My boyfriend makes fun of me for being too feminine.
- **Red light.** You have a right to express yourself and your gender any way that is right for you. Let your boyfriend know that his comments hurt your feelings. If your boyfriend continues this behavior after you tell him that it hurts you, consider ending the relationship.



We want as many green light behaviors as possible in our relationships. We may all come across yellow light and red light behaviors at some point. These may happen in our own or other loved ones’ relationships. These signal a need for change. Yellow light behaviors can mean a chance for the relationship to become healthier. Red light behaviors may mean the relationship needs to end. Find help from a trusted adult if you or a friend experience a red light behavior.

ENDING UNHEALTHY OR UNSAFE RELATIONSHIPS

Ending an unhealthy relationship—especially an unsafe one—is not like ending a healthy one. Your partner may not accept the breakup. Instead, they may try to control you using guilt, lies, or threats. This can make it very hard to end the relationship, and you may be worried about your safety. If this is the case, consider the tips below and talk to a trusted adult.

1

TRUST YOURSELF

If you feel scared or worried, there is probably a good reason for those feelings.

2

ASK FOR HELP

A local resource or the National Dating Abuse Helpline (1-866-331-9474) can also help you make a plan. More resources can be found at the end of this guide.

3

DO NOT BE ALONE WHEN YOU BREAK UP

Let your trusted adults and friends know when you plan to break up. If you can, bring someone with you.

4

EXPECT IT TO BE HARD

It's hard to end a relationship. Remember, it is okay to feel many different ways at once. There may be nothing you can say that will make your partner okay with the breakup. You may feel bad about the breakup even if the relationship is unhealthy.

5

BE AWARE OF THE RISK FOR CONTINUED VIOLENCE

Just because an unsafe relationship is over does not mean the risk of violence is over. If your ex comes to your house, a friend's house, or school and you are alone, do not open the door or talk to them alone. Change the passwords on your social media accounts and keep your accounts set to private.

WHERE AND HOW TO SEEK HELP

Research shows that LGBTQ+ youth are more at risk for experiencing violence, like bullying and dating violence, than their peers.^{8,9} If you are experiencing violence, seek help. **You deserve to be healthy and safe.**

However, being LGBTQ+ can present unique obstacles to seeking help like:

- Shame or fear of being outed may keep someone from seeking support
- Fear of not being taken seriously. Some people believe that violence does not occur in LGBTQ+ relationships. Others may think that the relationship is not a “real” relationship.
- Potential homophobia from school staff, law enforcement, or even victim support organizations

If you are experiencing discrimination, you are not alone—there are people and places you can go to for help. The following are just some of the many resources available to you. For more resources, see the [Appendix](#).

- Parents or family members
- Friends and peers
- School
 - School counselor
 - Supportive teachers
 - Genders and Sexualities Alliances (visit glsen.org/support-student-gsas)
 - LGBTQ+ serving organizations online or in your community
- Other trusted adults
 - Neighbors
 - Community groups
 - Healthcare providers
- Online referrals
 - Social media may be a place to receive support and talk with other youth who share your identity
 - For trusted websites, see the [Appendix](#)

HOW DO I KNOW IF I CAN TRUST SOMEONE?

- Test the waters with someone to see if they will be affirming and not shame or guilt you.
- If you have not come out to this person, consider whether they might out you to others before going to them for help.



REMEMBER!

IF YOU EXPERIENCE CYBERBULLYING, REPORT IT TO THE SOCIAL MEDIA APP AND TO A TRUSTED ADULT.

COMING OUT

“Coming out” is the process of understanding, accepting, valuing, and sharing your identities with yourself and with others. This process takes time, thought, support, and love. Coming out is a deeply personal choice, and there’s no right or wrong way to do it. You might only be ready to come out to yourself, and that’s okay! You might want to shout your discoveries from the rooftops so everyone will know who you are. That’s okay, too.

Understanding who you are can be a lifelong process. Who you are can and will change, and working to recognize, understand, and accept those changes is a very important part of creating a happy life.

THINKING ABOUT COMING OUT

Deciding to come out can stir up a bunch of emotions. Maybe you feel happy, excited, or relieved! You may also feel anxious, scared, or confused. All emotions you feel are normal, and you don’t need to be ashamed or hide from them. This process is about YOU and your needs, so check in with yourself. How are you feeling? Where do those feelings come from? What can you do about those feelings?

Your own safety should always be your number one priority. There is no right or wrong way to come out, and you may come out to some people before you come out to others. It’s healthy to do what’s safe and right for you, which may mean coming out now or holding off until you’re ready. Coming out should be your decision. It is not okay for others to pressure or force you to come out.

Remember that coming out is a process that you control. You can come out to your parent(s)/caregiver(s) and others on your own timeline and on your terms. You deserve to be received with love and support. You deserve to be affirmed and celebrated at this important time of your life. This section outlines a few suggestions to keep in mind if you are considering coming out.



1

YOU DON’T HAVE TO COME OUT UNTIL YOU ARE READY.

Coming out is a personal choice. It should only be done when you are ready and when you feel comfortable sharing with others. Do not let anyone else pressure you into coming out if you are not ready. This includes dating partners, friends, family—anyone. You decide if, how, and when you want to come out.

Remember that coming out is a process, just like understanding yourself is a process. Coming out does not mean you need to have all the answers yet. There may be parts of your gender identity or sexual orientation that you are still exploring, and that’s fine! Gender identity and sexual orientation are fluid concepts that can change throughout someone’s life.

2

YOUR SAFETY IS MOST IMPORTANT.

Put yourself first when deciding whether or when to come out to your parent(s)/caregiver(s). Prioritize your emotional well-being and physical safety. If you feel that coming out would be unsafe or harm your mental health, then don’t do it. If you feel like your safety might be at risk, or you just need someone safe to talk to, check out the resources at the end of this document for help.

3

THERE IS NO RIGHT OR WRONG WAY TO COME OUT.

Coming out is a unique experience for every person, and everyone has stuff in their lives that can influence their decisions about coming out. Everyone’s journey is different! Don’t let others dictate your coming out story. Do what feels best for you in your situation. You can come out by email, text message, calling, or telling someone in person. (Remember that anything you share online could be shared with others before you are ready.) You could bake a coming out cake or paint a coming out mural. You can make a big deal of it, or it can be something small. Whatever coming out is, it’s your decision.

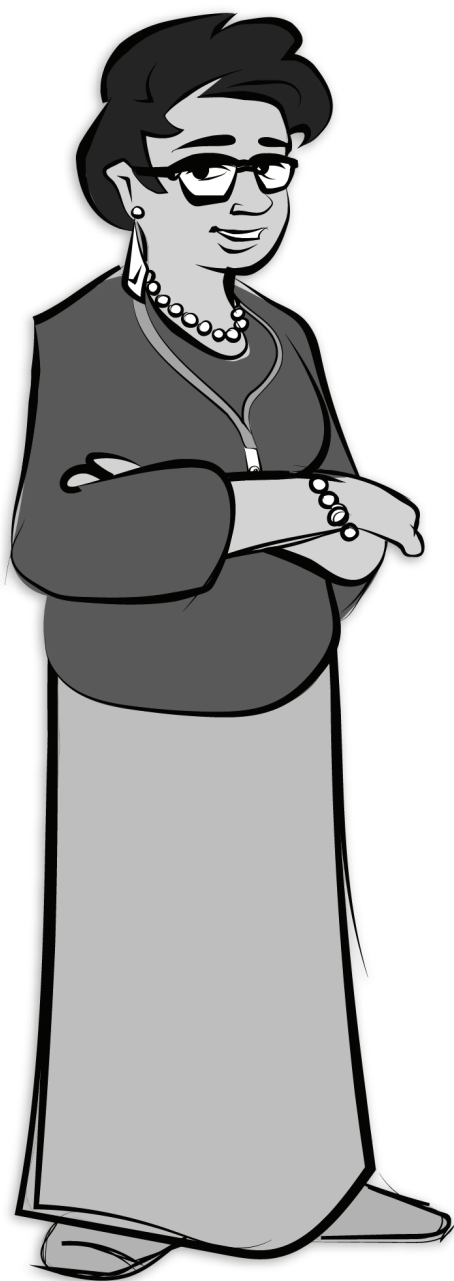
When coming out to someone, try to plan ahead but know that things may not go according to plan. That’s okay. Be kind to yourself and to the person you are coming out to. This could be a big step for both of you.

PREPARING FOR THE CONVERSATION

While this guide focuses on coming out to a parent/caregiver, the information can be helpful regardless of who you are coming out to.

If you are unsure how your parent/caregiver might react to you coming out, you can start by **testing the waters and checking out their responses**. Here are some ideas:

- Comment about an LGBTQ+ performer or character in a television show or movie. How do they respond?
- Talk about an LGBTQ+ celebrity who recently came out and how that was received. How do your parent(s)/caregiver(s) respond?
- Ask about an LGBTQ+ related news event. What do your parent(s)/caregiver(s) think?
- Share a story you heard or read about an LGBTQ+ person. What are your parent(s)/caregiver(s)' opinions?



Did you know our state legislators want to pass a law allowing transgender students to use the restroom that aligns with their gender identity? What do you think?

My classmate Sarah recently came out as nonbinary. Their parents were very supportive but are struggling with using “they” pronouns.



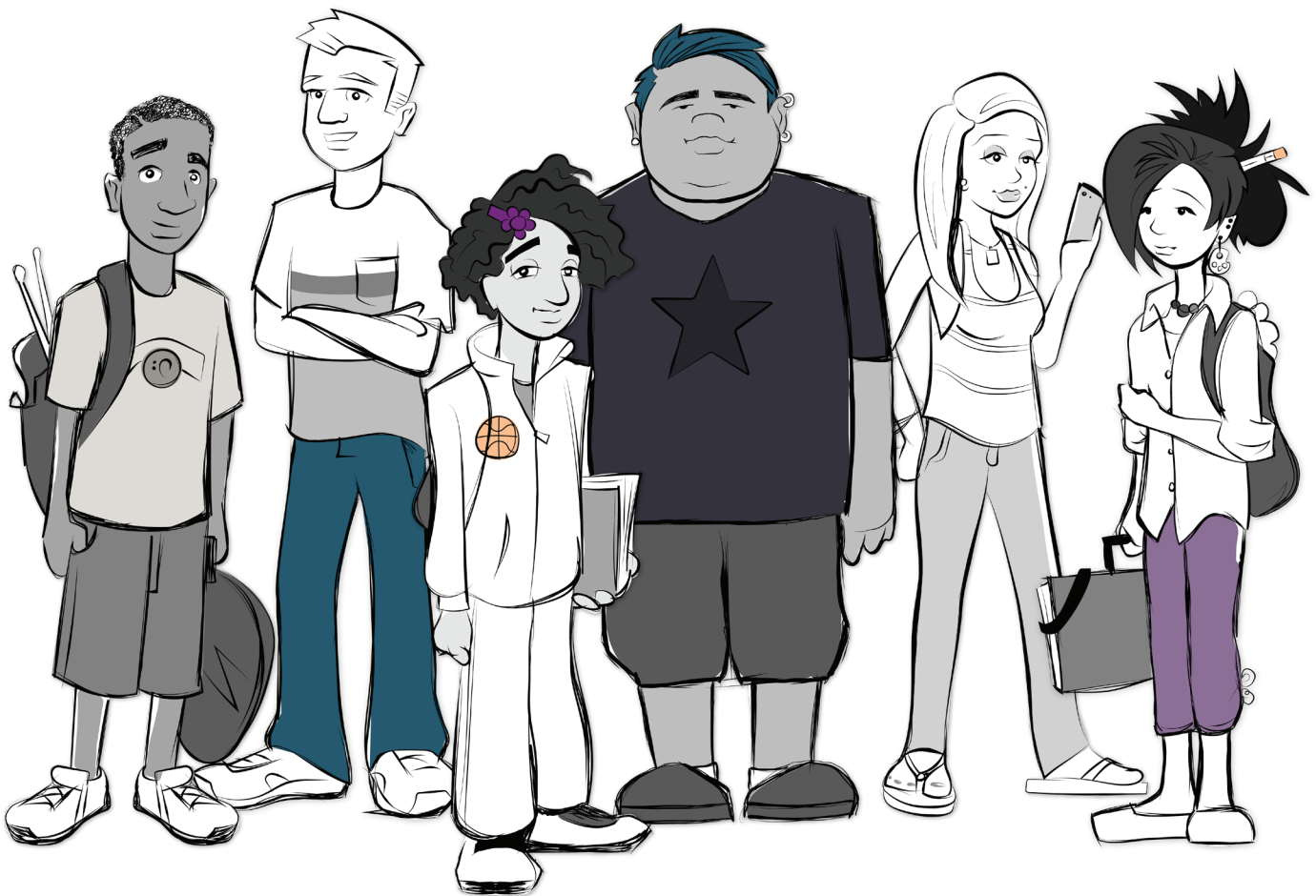


Keep in mind that the reactions of your parent(s)/caregiver(s) are meant to start the conversation. They can help you prepare for the best outcome when the topic is you and your journey! Remember: they love you and want what is best for you. Their feelings and opinions about you may be different than their feelings and opinions about others.

If your parent(s)/guardian(s) have a negative reaction, we provide more information below on how to respond.

Another step is to **reach out to someone** you trust to discuss coming out to your parent(s)/caregiver(s) before you do it. If you are not ready to talk to your parent(s)/caregiver(s), you can:

- Reach out to people living openly as LGBTQ+
- Call or do an online chat through an LGBTQ+ hotline like the [LGBT Hotline](#)
- Talk with your school counselor or another trusted adult



For example, if you know an LGBTQ+ person living openly or if you have chatted with someone on an LGBTQ+ hotline, you can talk with them. How did they come out to their parent(s)/caregiver(s)? How did they know it was the right time? You can also talk about the emotions you may be feeling about coming out.

If you are feeling anxious, one strategy is to **practice internally what you want to say beforehand**. Practice will help increase your confidence. Check out [Strong Family Alliance](#) for some examples of what you can say when coming out to a parent/caregiver.

You might consider having a **list of resources** available to share with your parent(s)/caregiver(s). Strong Family Alliance, FreedHearts, Family Acceptance Project, and PFLAG are just a few of the organizations providing resources for parents. FreedHearts provides information for families struggling with religious beliefs and the coming out process. While FreedHearts focuses on Christian families, the information provided can be useful for people from different faith traditions or non-religious families. PFLAG also has resource lists for a [multitude of faiths](#). Look for resources you think might be helpful for your parent(s)/caregiver(s) to read and have them ready if needed.

HAVING THE CONVERSATION

When you discuss your gender identity or sexual orientation with a parent/caregiver, they might be surprised. They might need some time to process this new information about you, a person they love very much. They might have questions about things they don't understand. It is important to maintain open communication. It will take effort on both your side and theirs.

Recall the earlier section on using healthy communication skills from Dating Matters to make a coming out conversation easier. Practicing your **communication skills**, like naming your feelings and active listening, can help prepare you for coming out conversations that could be challenging. For example, active listening can help you avoid jumping to conclusions and make sure you understand what the other person is saying. If you completed the Dating Matters program, you already had a lot of practice with these skills!



NOTICE WHAT YOUR BODY IS TELLING YOU. THEN, PAUSE!

- When you experience a strong feeling, your body sends clues—you start feeling different inside. You might feel your muscles tense up, your heart beat faster, or your hands shake. You might feel other changes, too.
- When you start to feel physical clues, say to yourself: PAUSE! Just like when you pause a movie, you need to pause the action and words in your own life.



NAME YOUR FEELING.

- Use the clues to name your feeling. Are you feeling sad, frustrated, disappointed, nervous, jealous, or something else?



PICK THE BEST WAY TO CALM DOWN AND DO IT!

- Take deep breaths.
- Use positive self-talk.
- Do something physically active or relaxing.
- Talk to someone you trust.



CHECK IN.

- Do you feel calmer and are you thinking more clearly? If not, you may need to try something else to calm down. It may be time to talk to someone you trust.

The tools you learned in Dating Matters can help you communicate well. Remember that these tools are just suggestions. When you're coming out to a parent/caregiver, it can be emotional. That can make it hard to practice these suggestions. You may feel excited, relieved, calm, or nervous. It's normal to feel all of these emotions. Remember that open communication allows your parent(s)/caregiver(s) to know you better. It can also help you feel more comfortable when you approach them. You can talk without worrying so much if it will end in an argument. Open communication encourages everyone to engage in the discussion.

Here are a few things to remember as you talk with your parent(s) or caregiver(s). These things may also be helpful in coming out to other important people in your life, such as a trusted friend or teacher.

1

COMING OUT IS AN ONGOING PROCESS.

You might need to have more than one conversation with your parent(s) or caregiver(s). You don't have to say everything at once. Give yourselves time to process. Come back to the conversation when you're both ready to continue. They might have lots of questions and might not know as much about the topics you're discussing as you do.

2

STEP AWAY IF NEEDED.

Take a break if you feel like you need one. Take a deep breath or two and tell your parent(s)/caregiver(s) that you need a break. You can continue the conversation when you're ready.

For example, you can say, "This discussion is important, but it is overwhelming me. I need some time to calm down. Can we talk more about this later?" Even if they don't realize it, they might also need some time alone to process. Taking time off can give your parent(s) or caregiver(s) the ability to process, too. Don't feel pressured to return to the conversation until you're both ready. Take as much time as you need.

3

BE CLEAR ABOUT EXPECTATIONS.

Coming out is your choice, so be clear about who gets to know what you're sharing. If you are not ready to come out to others, let your parent(s)/caregiver(s) know. You can come out to friends, other family members, and other people in your life if and when you're ready.

Tell your parent(s)/caregiver(s) what gender pronouns you want to use and how you want to be addressed. It may take them time to adjust, so try to be patient. We all screw up sometimes—help them practice and kindly remind them of your conversation.

4

YOU ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR HOW YOUR PARENT(S) OR CAREGIVER(S) PROCESS THEIR EMOTIONS.

One of the hardest things for us to learn is that we can only control our own emotions. While it is important to try to understand how others feel, you're not responsible for helping others process their emotions. Your parent(s)/caregiver(s) may need time to understand and accept the information you are giving them. They might have questions that you can't answer or need help that you can't give. Remember: It is not your job to process or soothe your parent(s)/caregiver(s) emotions for them. That is something they have to do for themselves. Your only job is to be you.

5

YOU DON'T NEED ALL THE ANSWERS.

Your parent(s)/caregiver(s) will probably have some questions for you. It is okay if you can't answer them all! There are resources that might help, and many organizations have resources available. The [Appendix](#) at the end of this document might help.

Remember: Coming out is a process. You'll need to keep the conversation going. Both you and your parent(s)/caregiver(s) are learning together!

PREPARING FOR DIFFERENT REACTIONS

Parent(s)/caregiver(s) will react differently when their child comes out. You might expect some reactions, but others might surprise you. You can try to prepare yourself for the different reactions they may have. But remember, it is not your responsibility to help them figure out how they feel. Also, keep in mind that this might be big news for them. How they feel at first might be different from how they feel later.

Some reactions parent(s)/caregiver(s) might have are:

- Being happy for you and fully accepting you
- Feeling grateful that you told them
- Saying they already knew or suspected it
- Being surprised or shocked
- Asking for time to think about the information
- Becoming upset
- Feeling unsure about what to do next

Again: You are NOT responsible for how your parent(s)/caregiver(s) feel or react. You are only in charge of yourself. Give them time to process the information while being honest about your feelings.

Every situation is unique. How you respond to your parent(s)/caregiver(s) will depend on you, your parent(s)/caregiver(s), and what's happening. Here are some ideas.

- **If your parent(s)/caregiver(s) are supportive,** tell them that you love and appreciate them.
 - You can say:
 - “I love you so much.”
 - “Your support means a lot to me.”
 - “Being honest about who I am is important. Keeping this secret has been difficult.”
 - “Thank you for...”
- **If your parent(s)/caregiver(s) are confused or worried,** stay calm and open. You can also offer tools that can help them.
 - You can say:
 - “I know this might take some time to get used to.”
 - “I don’t have all the answers.”
 - “Here are some tools that can help answer your questions.”
 - “I hope we can learn more together.”

- **If your parent(s)/caregiver(s) are upset, angry, or disapproving,** do what is best for you. Set boundaries you are comfortable with and, if needed, suggest continuing the conversation at a later time.
 - You can say:
 - “I can tell that you’re upset. I wanted to be honest with you.”
 - “I’m still the same person you love.”
 - “I hope you will love and accept me for who I am.”
 - “I need to take a break from talking about this. We can talk more about it later when I’m ready.”
 - “I need to stop for now.”



Getting a negative reaction from someone you love can be hard. Figuring out how to respond can be even harder. Here are some suggested responses that you can use. You can use these or change them to fit your situations.

Negative Reaction from Parent(s)/ Caregiver(s)	Positive Response from You
“Why did you wait so long to tell me?”	“I was not sure how you would react. I worried that you would not be supportive.”
“You were born a boy. I can’t refer to you as ‘she.’”	“I know it might be hard for you to change the pronouns you use when talking about me. It means a lot when you try.”
“This is just a phase. Give it time and you will grow out of it.”	“I’ve known this for a long time. It’s not going to change. This is who I am.”
“If that is what you choose to do with your life, we don’t have to talk about it.”	“I’m not ‘choosing’ to do this with my life. It’s who I am. I hope that, with some time, you’ll accept that. Then, we can talk about it more later.”



IF YOU ARE WORRIED ABOUT YOUR SAFETY, YOU SHOULD LEAVE THE ROOM OR AREA. SPEAK TO AN ADULT YOU TRUST WHEN YOU CAN OR CALL 911 IF YOU FEEL THREATENED.



IF SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU, THAT PERSON HAS ENTRUSTED YOU WITH INFORMATION THAT IS IMPORTANT TO THEM.

You should **not** share that information. Let the person come out to others on their own when they are ready.

Many resources exist for having coming out and other conversations about sexual orientation and gender identity. For example, [PFLAG](#), [Trevor Project](#), [Family Acceptance Project](#), and the [Strong Family Alliance](#) are all great resources to explore for information as you consider how to talk with your family about your identity. These and other selected resources are available in the next section of this guide.

REFERENCES AND NOTES

1. This guide was developed after the comparative randomized controlled trial that found Dating Matters was effective in preventing teen dating violence and other outcomes.
2. Morgan, E.M. (2022). Same-sex relationships and LGBTQ youth. In *Encyclopedia of Child and Adolescent Development* (eds. S. Hupp and J. Jewell).
3. Peitzmeier, S. M., Malik, M., Kattari, S. K., Marrow, E., Stephenson, R., Agénor, M., & Reisner, S. L. (2020). Intimate partner violence in transgender populations: Systematic review and meta-analysis of prevalence and correlates. *American Journal of Public Health*, 110, E1–E14. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2020.305774>
4. Black, M. C., Basile, K. C., Breiding, M. J., et al. (2011). The national intimate partner and sexual violence survey (NISVS): An overview of 2010 findings on victimization by sexual orientation. National Center for Injury Prevention and Control, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/pdf/cdc_nisvs_victimization_final-a.pdf
5. Abreu, R. L., & Kenny, M. C. (2018, March). Cyberbullying and LGBTQ youth: A systematic literature review and recommendations for prevention and intervention. *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma*, 11, 81–97. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-017-0175-7>
6. Human Rights Campaign (n.d.). Sexual assault and the LGBTQ community. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/sexual-assault-and-the-lgbt-community>
7. James S. E., Herman J. L., Rankin, S., Keisling, M., Mottet, L., & Anafi, M. (2016). The report of the 2015 U.S. transgender survey. National Center for Transgender Equality. <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Full-Report-Dec17.pdf>
8. Underwood J. M., Brener, N., Thornton, J., et al. (2020). Overview and methods for the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System — United States, 2019. *MMWR Supplement*, 69(Suppl-1), 1–10. <https://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.su6901a1>
9. Johns, M. M., Lowry, R., Andrzejewski, J., et al. (2019). Transgender identity and experiences of violence victimization, substance use, suicide risk, and sexual risk behaviors among high school students—19 states and large urban school districts, 2017. *MMWR*, 68(3), 65–71.

APPENDIX 1: RESOURCES

Disclaimer: Links to non-Federal organizations found at this site are provided solely as a service to our users. These links do not constitute an endorsement of these organizations or their programs by CDC or the Federal Government, and none should be inferred. CDC is not responsible for the content of the individual organization web pages found at these links.

GENERAL RESOURCES

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION (APA)	https://www.apa.org/topics/lgbtq/sexual-orientation	APA is the leading scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States.
CENTERLINK	https://www.lgbtcenters.org/	CenterLink is an international nonprofit organization and member-based association of LGBTQ+ centers and other LGBTQ+ organizations serving local and regional communities. Their work focuses on strengthening, supporting, and connecting LGBTQ+ community centers throughout the U.S. and the world.
FREEDHEARTS	www.freedhearts.org	FreedHearts is a nonprofit organization that provides information for Christian parents of LGBTQ+ children who may be struggling with reconciling their love and faith.
IT GETS BETTER PROJECT	https://itgetsbetter.org/	It Gets Better Project is a global nonprofit organization that works to uplift, empower, and connect lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ+) youth around the globe.
LAMBDA LEGAL	https://www.lambdalegal.org/publications/fs_resources-for-lgbtq-youth	Lambda Legal is a nonprofit organization working to achieve full recognition of the civil rights of people who identify as LGBTQ+. They provide a list of resources for LGBTQ+ youth by state.
NATIONAL QUEER AND TRANS THERAPISTS OF COLOR NETWORK	https://nqttcn.com/en/community-resources/	The NQTTCN offers resources specifically tailored to queer and trans people of color, including crisis hotlines, online support, and organizations.
PFLAG	www.pflag.org	PFLAG is the largest organization for people who identify as LGBTQ+, their parents and families, and allies. PFLAG runs local chapters across the United States as well as an extensive website that includes resources about gender identity and sexual orientation and family acceptance.
Q CHAT SPACE	https://www.qchatspace.org/	Q Chat Space is a digital LGBTQ+ center where teens join live chat support groups. Also available in Spanish (disponible en español).
THE SAFE ZONE PROJECT	https://thesafezoneproject.com/	The Safe Zone Project offers free, online allyship training.

CRISIS INTERVENTION AND SAFETY PLANNING

LGBT NATIONAL HELP CENTER	https://www.lgbthotline.org/	The LGBT National Help Center runs several hotlines, including one for youth that provides resources, peer support, and information for youth and young adults through age 25. They have weekly moderated group chatrooms for youth younger than 19 focused on finding community and support.
NATIONAL DOMESTIC VIOLENCE HOTLINE	https://www.thehotline.org/resources/abuse-in-lgbtq-communities/	The National Domestic Violence Hotline is available 24/7 by texting “START” to 88788, through live chat, or by calling 1-800-799-SAFE. Their website includes a section on abuse in LGBTQ+ communities.
NATIONAL RUNAWAY SAFELINE	https://www.1800runaway.org/	The National Runaway Safeline is an anonymous, free national communications system for runaway and homeless youth, their parents and families, teens in crisis, and others who might benefit from its services.
NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE	https://988lifeline.org/ https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org/help-yourself/lgbtq/	The lifeline provides 24/7, free, and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones, and best practices for professionals in the United States. Anyone experiencing a mental health emergency can access the lifeline through the 3-digit code “988.” Users can call, text, or chat to be connected with trained counselors.
TREVOR PROJECT	https://www.thetrevorproject.org/	The Trevor Project is a suicide prevention and mental health organization for LGBTQ young people. Connect to a crisis counselor 24/7, 365 days a year, from anywhere in the U.S. It is 100% confidential, and 100% free.

HEALTH

ADVOCATES FOR YOUTH	https://www.advocatesforyouth.org/issue/honest-sex-education/	Advocates for Youth is a nonprofit organization and advocacy group dedicated to sexuality education, the prevention of HIV and other sexually transmitted disease, teenage pregnancy prevention, youth access to contraception, and equality for LGBT youth.
AMAZE	https://amaze.org	Amaze is a free, video-based sexual health resource for youth. Amaze provides helpful resources on the various topics that have been discussed throughout the Dating Matters program and this supplemental resource, including dating safety and relationships.
CENTERS FOR DISEASE CONTROL AND PREVENTION (CDC)	https://www.cdc.gov/	CDC works to protect and improve the health of youth. They have done extensive research on the health and well-being of LGBTQ+ youth.
SEX, ETC.	www.sexetc.org/	Sex, etc. provides sex education information including stories written by teen staff writers.

COMING OUT

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN	www.hrc.org	<p>The Human Rights Campaign (HRC) provides a resource guide for coming out, including making a coming out plan, reactions to prepare for, and additional resources. HRC also provides information for transgender and nonbinary, lesbian/gay/bisexual, Black, Hispanic, Asian/Pacific Islander, and many others in the LGBTQ+ community.</p>
STRONG FAMILY ALLIANCE	https://www.strongfamilyalliance.org/how-to-come-out-to-parents/	<p>Strong Family Alliance provides information for youth on the coming out process, including suggestions for planning ahead when deciding to come out and how to respond to different reactions your parent(s)/caregiver(s) may have. This site also provides useful information for parent(s)/caregiver(s) who have a child who came out, including personal stories from parent(s)/caregiver(s) who went through this process.</p>

TRANSGENDER AND GENDER NON-CONFORMING YOUTH

GENDER SPECTRUM	https://genderspectrum.org/	<p>Gender Spectrum works to create gender sensitive and inclusive environments for all children and teens.</p>
GLMA	https://www.glma.org/	<p>Provides guidance on health topics transgender persons can discuss with healthcare provider.</p>
OUT OF YER SHELL	https://outofyershell.com/for-trans-kids/	<p>Provides resources for transgender and gender non-conforming youth and their loved ones.</p>
TRANS LIFELINE	https://translifeline.org/resource/social-transition/	<p>Trans Lifeline is a nonprofit organization run by and for trans people. Offers direct emotional and financial support to trans people in crisis. Their hotline is a peer support phone service run by trans people.</p>
TRANSGENDER LAW CENTER	https://transgenderlawcenter.org/resources/youth	<p>Largest national trans-led organization. Works to change law, policy, and attitudes so that all people can live safely and free from discrimination regardless of their gender identity or expression.</p>
UC SAN FRANCISCO, CENTER OF EXCELLENCE FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH	https://prevention.ucsf.edu/transhealth	<p>Works to advance health equity for trans and gender nonbinary communities.</p>
UNDERSTANDING NEOPRONOUNS	https://www.hrc.org/resources/understanding-neopronouns	<p>This guide by the Human Rights Campaign explains neopronouns— or pronouns other than those most commonly used— and answers questions about their use.</p>
WORLD PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR TRANSGENDER HEALTH (WPATH)	https://www.wpath.org/	<p>WPATH is a nonprofit organization devoted to transgender health. Their site includes a “find a provider” tool that you can use to locate a provider who is also a member of the WPATH organization.</p>

SCHOOLS

GLSEN	https://www.glsen.org/	GLSEN is an education organization working to end discrimination, harassment, and bullying based on sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression and to prompt LGBT cultural inclusion and awareness in K-12 schools.
GSA NETWORK	https://gsanetwork.org/	Nonprofit organization that assists students with starting gay–straight alliances to fight homophobia and transphobia in schools.
STOMP OUT BULLYING	https://www.stompoutbullying.org/lgbtq-bullying	Stomp Out Bullying works to reduce bullying and cyberbullying of all types, including through education against homophobia and discrimination against LGBTQ+ youth. They run a HelpChat line staffed with trained crisis counselors several days a week that is free and confidential for persons ages 13-24.

APPENDIX 2: GLOSSARY

There are a lot of words that we use when talking about gender identity and sexual orientation.

SEX AND GENDER

- **Sex:** means a person’s biological status as **male**, **female**, or **intersex**. It’s usually assigned at birth by a doctor. It’s based on a person’s physical traits.
- **Intersex:** is a person who is born with physical traits that don’t fit the boxes of “male” or “female.” Intersex traits happen naturally. Being intersex is not a medical problem.
- **Gender identity:** is how we view ourselves. It’s how we see ourselves as boys, girls, or something else. Only you can define your gender. It often develops early in life, and it can continue to change over time. It does not have to match someone’s sex assigned at birth.
- **Transgender:** is a person whose gender identity is not the same as their sex assigned at birth. Transgender includes:
 - **Transgender boy:** Someone who was assigned female at birth and identifies as a boy.
 - **Transgender girl:** Someone who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a girl.
- **Cisgender:** is someone whose current gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth.
- **Genderfluid:** is someone whose gender expression or gender identity changes. That change might be in gender expression, like dressing as a boy one day and a girl on another day. Gender fluidity can look different for different people.
- **Genderqueer:** describes a person who identifies as something other than what we traditionally think of as “boy” or “girl.” People use the word **genderqueer** to mean different things. Some people use it to mean the same thing as nonbinary. Others consider the term to cover any identity that isn’t cisgender.
- **Gender pronouns:** are the different pronouns that people use. They can change based on the person’s gender. Common **gender pronouns** are she/her/hers, he/him/his, and they/them/theirs. There are also other **gender pronouns** a person may use.
- **Gender expression:** is how a person communicates their gender. It can be how they dress or behave.
- **Nonbinary person:** is someone who identifies as a gender other than boy or girl.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION

- **Sexual orientation:** a person’s attraction to others. Like gender, only you can define your sexual orientation. It may change over time.
- **Straight or heterosexual:** means a person is only attracted to members of another gender. For example, a boy who is attracted to girls or a girl who is attracted to boys.
- **Gay:** refers to someone who is attracted primarily to members of the same gender. It is used most frequently to describe boys who are attracted primarily to other boys, although it can be used for boys and girls.
- **Lesbian:** refers to girls who are attracted to other girls.
- **Bisexual:** refers to a person who is attracted to more than one gender.
- **Pansexual:** refers to a person who is attracted to people no matter what their gender is. They might be attracted to boys, girls, and people of other genders.
- **Asexual:** refers to a person who might not be attracted to people of any gender. It can also include people who are **demisexual**.

- **Demisexual:** means a person experiences some physical attraction, but only sometimes. They might need a strong connection with a partner before they're attracted to them.
- **Queer:** describes someone who isn't straight or cisgender. Although it's sometimes used as a positive term among LGBTQ+ people today, **queer** was an insulting word in the past, so some people may not like to use it.
- **Questioning:** describes people who are exploring their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

OTHER RELEVANT TERMS

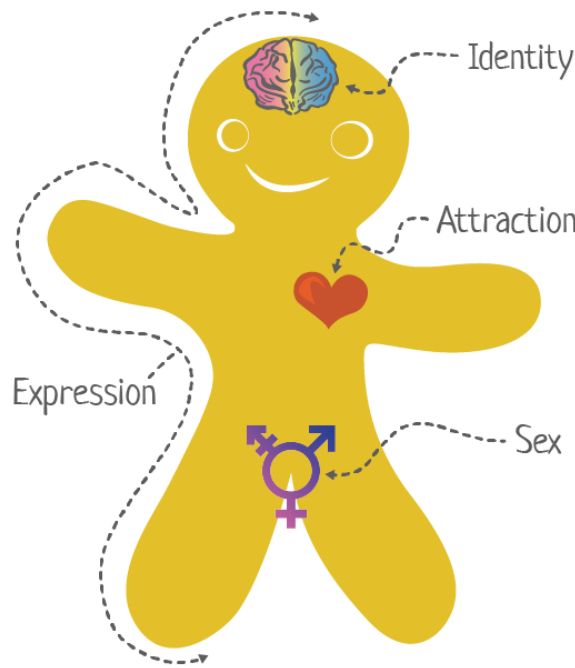
- **Coming out:** is a process where a person accepts and appreciates their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Then they begin to share it with others. It will look different for everyone and should happen in each person's own way and on their own timeline.
- **Ally:** describes someone who is supportive of LGBTQ+ people. Allies can be straight and cisgender or people in the LGBTQ+ community who support each other. For example, a lesbian can be an ally to the bisexual community.
- **Genders and Sexualities Alliance (GSA):** are student-run groups that unite LGBTQ+ students and allies. They build community and organize around issues affecting their schools and communities. These may sometimes be called "Gay-Straight Alliances."
- **LGBTQ+:** is a term that includes lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and other people. The + includes all the gender identities and sexual orientations that are not covered by the other initials.

APPENDIX 3: THE GENDERBREAD PERSON



The “Genderbread Person”^{*} is a good tool to understand the difference between sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation. Remember sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation are not the same. Also, keep in mind that sex, gender identity, and sexual orientation apply to everyone, not just to people who identify as LGBTQ+.

The Genderbread Person v4 by its pronounced METROsexual.com



⊖ means a lack of what's on the right side

Gender Identity

- ⊖ → Woman-ness
- ⊖ → Man-ness

Gender Expression

- ⊖ → Femininity
- ⊖ → Masculinity

Anatomical Sex

- ⊖ → Female-ness
- ⊖ → Male-ness

Identity ≠ Expression ≠ Sex
Gender ≠ Sexual Orientation

Sex Assigned At Birth
 Female Intersex Male

- ♥ Sexually Attracted to... and/or (a/o)
- ⊖ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
 - ⊖ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

- ♥ Romantically Attracted to...
- ⊖ → Women a/o Feminine a/o Female People
 - ⊖ → Men a/o Masculine a/o Male People

^{*} <https://www.genderbread.org/resource/genderbread-person-v4-0>