

Supporting LGBT+ and questioning adolescent children

What does it mean and why is it important?

As parents and carers, we want our children to grow up feeling safe, loved and secure in the knowledge that they have a place in the world and the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Puberty can be a time of exploration; trying out different identities and discovering likes and dislikes when it comes to who we are and how we present ourselves in the world. Sometimes that exploration for young people can take place in a peer group. Other young people may want to explore this individually, without sharing with others until they are sure of their identity or sexuality. There are many reasons for this, including fear of rejection, wanting to be sure before they say anything, shame, stigma, or even cultural and religious beliefs conflicting with identity or sexuality. Some people may feel different even if they don't have the words to describe how they feel. It can take time to put words and feelings/emotions to the "differentness" some people feel inside.

Everyone has a sexuality. It is shaped by many different factors and for some people it is more fluid and for others, it can be quite fixed. There are many ways people can be attracted to someone, and it's not all about sex. Intimacy and attraction can be experienced in many ways.

At birth we are assigned a gender – male or female – but there are people born who do not fit binary notions of male or female bodies, called intersex. There are others who, as they develop, feel their internal sense of who they are – their gender identity, does not match with what they were assigned at birth. There are many ways people can identify. Experiences for trans people range from those with body and gender dysphoria (the feeling of discomfort or distress that occurs in people whose body or gender identity differs from their sex assigned at birth) to those who would never have surgery or take hormones but just want to live as a gender which is not the gender they were assigned at birth.

Being accepted and respected around sexuality and gender identity really makes a huge difference in mental wellbeing, and even physical health. Sexual and gender identities can change over a lifetime. In truth, as people, we all are constantly developing ourselves and this can be equally true of our sexuality and gender identity.

LGBT+ is an acronym meaning Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender. The plus sign signifies all the other sexual and gender identities that fall outside of heterosexuality (being "straight") and outside of identifying with the gender assigned at birth. You can learn more about some of the different terms from Childline [here](#).

Access to safe spaces for young people to explore their identity or be their authentic self are important. There are LGBT+ youth groups across Hampshire and the Isle of

Wight that can support either in a group or one to one session if needed, in a safe and friendly environment. A lot of schools and colleges also have LGBT+ groups.

If you don't understand or want to learn more, seek support from our resources or signposted services below to gain a better understanding.

Parent and carer top tips to support your LGBTQI+ or questioning child

- Be patient and respect their journey at their own pace – no-one can tell anyone else what their sexuality or gender identity is. It's a deeply personal process.
- For some people, the labels, language and terminology around their sexuality or gender identity is important and validating when used correctly.
- Allow them to guide you on being public and sharing information about their sexuality or gender identity – never “out” someone without their consent.
- Educate yourself and support your child. When someone “comes out” it can be a transition for everyone around them – so get your family connected with LGBT+ organisations who can help support you too.
- You don't have to remember every type of flag or identity – ask what it means for that person, and you are more likely to remember that.
- Supporting your child who is LGBT+ or questioning can literally be the difference between life or death. There is nothing more beautiful than someone being their authentic self. They really will flourish.

Advice, services and information to help parents and carers

<i>Link and /or QR code</i>	<i>Description</i>
Sexuality and sexual orientation NSPCC	NSPCC advice and information on sexuality.
Sexuality Childline	Childline resource on some different definitions on sexuality.
Gender identity NSPCC	NSPCC advice on gender identity and transitioning including parent support.
List of LGBTQ+ terms - Stonewall	LGBT+ terminology explained by Stonewall .
New guide for parents of LGBT+ children - GOV.UK	Government published guide for parents of LGBT+ children.

[Welcome - FFLAG](#)

A national voluntary organisation and charity, **FFLAG** is dedicated to supporting families and their LGBT+ loved ones.

Where can my child get national advice and support?

LGBT Foundation is a national organisation providing advice, support and information services to LGBT+ communities.

[Click here](#)

GALOP is an anti-abuse charity working with the LGBT+ community on issues such as hate crime, conversion therapy and domestic abuse.

[Click here](#)

LGBT+ Switchboard is an LGBT+ helpline, messaging, and support service.

[Click here](#)

MindOut provides LGBT+ mental health support.

[Click here](#)

Where can I get local advice and support?

Hampshire and the Isle of Wight:

Breakout Youth run support groups and one to one sessions for 11–25-year-olds in Southampton, New Forest, Basingstoke, Andover and on the Isle of Wight. There is also a virtual group for those unable to attend in person.

[Click here](#)

Hampshire:

Fareham, Gosport & Havant have some useful resources including a coming out guide at the bottom of the web page.

[Click here](#)

Beyond Reflections local support for transgender, non-binary and questioning people, their family and close friends. Support includes facilitated support groups, wellbeing drop-in sessions and counselling.

[Click here](#)

Isle of Wight:

Network Ryde runs a monthly LGBT+ group.

[Click here](#)

Out on an Island is an LGBT+ oral history project and also offers group support.
[Click here](#)