



COLAGE's Guide for when a Parent or Caregiver Comes out as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and/or Queer

Welcome to COLAGE! We are a national group for youth and adults with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, and/or transgender parents. COLAGE unites people with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer parents into a network of peers and supports them as they nurture and empower each other to be skilled, self-confident, and just leaders in our collective communities. If you're reading this, it probably means that you recently found out that your parent is LGBTQ. Here at COLAGE, we all remember the unique, frustrating, and sometimes humorous ways that we came to understand this information. Some of us had to endure "a talk" while others of us discovered "the secret." No matter how we found out, that moment when the reality that our parent is LGBTQ hits us can feel life-changing. Most of us remember feeling that we would have to face all of these huge changes alone.

The main thing we want you to know at COLAGE is that YOU ARE NOT ALONE! There ARE other people like you, and there ARE other families like yours. In fact, in the United States alone it is estimated that there are six million youth and adults with LGBTQ parents. According to a study put out by the Williams Institute in 2013 that gathered data from 2010-12, there are nearly 220,000 children under the age of 18 living with a same-sex couple (and this does not even count all of the people who were living with their straight parent, or with a single LGBT parent, or who are over the age of 18, or who have a transgender parent, or who...well, you get the picture).

That's why we have made this guide. We remember when we found out that our parent(s) were LGBTQ – we felt that our life would be changed forever, that we would lose all of our friends, that our world had been turned upside down, and that we would have to be all alone from now on. It's true that some parts of your life might change, and that you might deal with some special issues around friends and community. But, it is not true that you have to do it all alone. This guide will help you figure out for yourself some of the first and biggest questions you have about yourself, your friends, your family, your school, and the communities and world that you are all a part of.

At the same time, when we set out to write the guide, we realized immediately that we would not be able to do it – or at least we wouldn't be able to do all of it. There are so many folks with LGBTQ parents, with so many different types of families, all over the country, in every race and religion, in every culture and speaking many languages, with different opinions and beliefs. No one single guide could possibly take on every possible issue that we face! We decided to narrow it down to the big six, those people and places that we hear about time and time again on our email lists, and in our programs. Not everything in this guide will apply to you – some of it you will be ready to think about and some of it you will want to wait for a different time. Some of our suggestions will work for you, others might not be quite right for your situation. As you read, feel free to take what you want and leave the rest. Here's what we thought you would most want to know about:

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*This guide was created to mainly address issues of parents coming out about their sexuality. Although there are many similarities between what someone deals with when they find out their parent is lesbian, gay, bisexual or queer and when someone finds out their parent is transgender, there are differences as well. We have great resources like our Kids of Trans guide and a list serv just for folks with trans parents. If your parent is transgender, please contact us for more specific resources relating to having transgender parents.

COLAGE's Vision and Values

Vision

We envision a world in which youth with one or more lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and/or queer (LGBTQ) parents are connected to a broad community of peers and mentors, are recognized as the authorities of their shared experiences, belong to respected and valued family structures, and have the tools and support to create and maintain a just society. We envision a world in which all the children grow up loved and cared-for in families and communities that teach them about, connect them to, and honor their unique heritage; and in which youth and adults with LGBTQ parents nurture each other, provide mentorships, support systems, and acceptance for each other, and foster a commitment to social justice and inter-generational responsibility in order to ensure the resilience and prosperity of our community. We envision COLAGE community as part of larger movements to create positive change, heal from and ultimately counter discrimination in school systems, social services, mental and physical health systems, the media, legislatures, legal systems, and religious institutions in order to build communities in which all families are valued, protected, reflected, and embraced, and every human being has the freedom to express sexual orientation, gender identity, and self.



Values

- ❖ We value social justice and the pursuit of greater social equity.
- ❖ We value community building.
- ❖ We value the voices of youth eight to eighteen as leaders in our community.
- ❖ We value inclusivity, diversity, and cultural competency.
- ❖ We value our responsibility as people with LGBTQ parents to support ourselves, each other, and our broader community.

You

How do you feel about this? Folks with LGBTQ parents report a variety of emotions:

Anger

- That your parent is LGBTQ and “not normal” or “not like other parents”
- About how you found out or were told
- With how your non-LGBTQ parent is reacting

If your dad decided it would be a good idea to tell your prom date about his new boyfriend without asking you first, or you found out your mom was a lesbian by catching her kissing the neighbor (surprise!), take a deep breath. Our parents are not perfect. Neither are our other family members, and unfortunately neither is the world. But that doesn't mean it doesn't sometimes make us want to scream. If you sometimes need to go pound on a pillow or vent to a friend, do it! Expressing your anger is the best way to keep it from building up inside.

Confusion

- That your parent seemed happy as a heterosexual, or comfortable in their gender identity
- About what it means to be “gay” or “transgender”
- About how homosexuality or being transgender fit into the moral and religious beliefs that you have

In the long run we are all trying to figure out what makes us happy, but in the short run it is not always clear how we are supposed to feel or react. Before our parents came out, some of us had no idea what gay meant, or maybe had never even heard of “transgender.” Some of us had a lot of ideas about what it meant to be a gay or trans person, and it might turn out that we have to question things that we have never really thought about before. A lot of these ideas turn out to be totally crazy but some are right on. Most can be addressed by just asking – if you have a question that you are not comfortable asking your parent, you can try asking another adult, a close friend, or another person with an LGBTQ parent. Some questions might not have answers – you may never completely understand the choices your parent has made, and this can be frustrating. Even so, your parent is your parent – with or without the rainbow suspenders.



Fear

- That your parent will get HIV
- That you or your family will experience violence or discrimination
- About how your parent “coming out” might affect your life

Fears like these are totally understandable. There are a lot of negative things out there that are associated with being LGBTQ. Some of these ideas (like that all gay people get AIDS) are completely false. Others (like that people might hate your family) might have some truth to them, but it's probably not as bad as we might think (although some people will hate your family, many more will be open and accepting toward them). Fear often comes from something we don't understand, so if there are questions you have, educate yourself. The best way to deal with fear is to face it. Nine times out of ten you'll find that there isn't anything to be afraid of. If there is something to be afraid of, friends and other folks with LGBTQ parents can help you figure out how to face those fears.

Relief

- That your parent is happier with their new lives, relationships, or bodies
- That you better understand the reasons behind a divorce or break-up
- That your parent can be a better parent when they are not trying to hide who they are

For a lot of us it wasn't until after our parents came out that we felt like a family. Finally knowing and understanding the truth can release a lot of pressure. Coming out of the closet can mean finally opening the door to healthy, honest, relationships with all loved ones.

Questions

- About how this might affect your own sexuality
- About what other people will think or say about you
- About how this will affect your relationship to other communities you belong to

Pride

- that your parent is standing up for how they are
- that you or your family is unique
- that you are part of diverse community

Well yeah! In a world of look-a-like EVERYTHING it's pretty cool to have a family that's not part of the cookie cutter norm. Not all Dads own the latest Madonna CD and not every kid gets to go see drag shows at the pride parade. We are privileged to experience a lot of joys that other, more "mainstream" families, don't know about or understand. The strength and courage it takes to be different in a culture that doesn't embrace difference can make you a more compassionate and wise person.

Finding Support

With all this "feelings" stuff going on, who are you going to turn to? Later in the guide, we will talk about how to tackle friends, family, and school so that wherever you go, someone has got your back. But before we can expect anyone else to have our back, we need to have our own.

How to support yourself.

Your family is going through a lot of changes. Your friends may, or may not, be willing to stick by you – or they might not know how. Everything is up in the air, and possibly about to hit the fan. But as long as you have yourself, you will not be alone. Here are some things you can do to take care of yourself. Whether you are just trying to keep up a cheerful outlook, or really working to make sure you don't explode, these are some good ways to keep the pressure off.

- Journal, meditate, write or do art.
- Exercise about twenty to thirty minutes, two or three times a week: Physical activity burns stress chemicals that can cause moodiness when they build up in your body.
- Ask yourself am I too Hungry, Angry, Lonely, or Tired? If so, HALT, and do something to address these needs.
- Have fun – whatever makes you feel happy, make sure you take time regularly to relax and do the things that put a smile on your face.
- Don't forget about COLAGE! COLAGErs will have a bunch of ideas and ways for you to feel less alone and to connect with others who are or have been the same situations you are in. See our resource guide in the back for more info.



What about the professionals?

A lot of us avoid psychiatrists and psychologists and therapists and all those other ists that try to figure out what makes you tick. This is perfectly understandable – we have been told, directly or indirectly, that our parents are bad parents and that we are not going to turn out very well if they are allowed to raise us. People have teased us for being weird and different. Politicians and religious leaders have said that we are damaged, sinful, dangerous, and possibly a little bit crazy. In fact, up until 1972, homosexuality was considered a mental disorder, and transgenderism

is still on the American Psychological Association's list of mental illnesses even today. A little healthy avoidance of 'professionals' is not necessarily a bad thing.

At the same time, if things are really getting to you, you might think about seeking advice from a hotline or a counselor. Many of us have gotten some really great ideas about how to deal with feelings and solve problems we're facing from a therapist or counselor. The trick is finding a good one:

A GOOD COUNSELOR:

- Won't tell your teachers, parents, or friends what you talk to them about
- Let's you decide what you do and don't want to talk about and how you do and don't want to solve your problems
- Understands that LGBTQ people are capable of being good parents AND understands that LGBTQ people are capable of making mistakes as parents
- Doesn't make assumptions about your family or how you feel about having LGBTQ parents
- Educates themselves about the LGBTQ community and doesn't rely on you to teach them

A BAD COUNSELOR:

- Breaks confidentiality (tells someone else something that you wanted to remain private)
- Says homophobic things about you or your parents
- Defends other people's homophobia, or pressures you to stay 'in the closet'
- Pressures you to 'come out' or say and do things that you are not comfortable with
- Doesn't listen to you or let you take control of what happens during your appointments

The most important thing is to trust your instincts. Counseling is not for everyone, but it can really work if you find someone who is a good match.

Feeling better yet?

It might take a long time before you are in a place where you really feel ok about having an LGBTQ parent. As you get older, it might be less and less important to you – or it might take on new meaning that you never expected! Just remember what we said at the beginning – never forget that you are not alone, no matter how you are feeling (or not feeling) about your parents. There are countless others who have been where you are. Even though we are all unique we also have a lot in common. Even though you will have to figure a lot of stuff out on your own, you can always call on the COLAGE community for support.

Family

Not all our families are the same. Your "family" might refer to a few people all living in the same house, or it might refer to many households all spread out from one another. Your family might include just one same-sex couple, or many different kinds of couples, or it might have one or more single parents. Your family might have experienced divorces or break-ups, remarriages or re-partnerings – it may have sudden or much bigger than it was before. Many COLAGE families come from donor insemination families have people all of the same race, others have people of different races, or from different backgrounds. Though we all have LGBTQ parents, there may still be a lot we don't know or understand about each other's family. Since we all know what it is like to feel that our family is ignored or misunderstood, we should take care to learn about and respect each other's families. We should never define family in terms of anyone. At COLAGE, we think of family as any group of people who have made a commitment to care for one another, and to share certain responsibilities. Beyond that, we try to let people define their families themselves.

With our unique families come specific questions that we may not feel able to ask or talk about. We might feel pressure to say only the good things about our families or we might just not have any space to talk about what's going on. A lot of times we are so caught up worrying about what other people think about our families, we do not spend enough time asking what we think about our own families. Some of us



remember that everyone in our families was so obsessed with gender or sexuality, other parts of family life got ignored. Often a parent who has just come out is so busy thinking about their 'new' identity that they might not realize that you have other stuff going on or be able to really focus on you the way a parent should. An LGBTQ parent who had to work really hard just to be able to adopt children or become pregnant may not have had the time or support they needed to fully prepare for the needs of their new child. In this guide we will not address every family issue you might have – you can always bring your specific story to a chapter, friend, or online group. Below are some of the most widespread issues, new dilemmas, and questions that come up for us when newly navigating the unfamiliar terrain of LGBTQ family life:

Divorces and Break-Ups- Why can't we all just get along?

Folks with LGBTQ parents have to deal with this all the time, but that doesn't make it any easier when your married parents divorce, or your same-sex parents decide to split up. For same-sex couples, there are no official marriages or divorces to legally redefine these relationships, so things can get especially confusing. There might be personal, or even legal difficulties, figuring out the role of the non-biological or non-adoptive parent(s). Regardless of your parents' sexual orientation, fights over the relationship, property, custody, and parenting can get ugly, whether lawyers get involved or not. This is never an easy process and sometimes when parents fight you might feel put in the middle of their problems with each other. You might even start to feel like it is your fault that they are fighting or that they decided to break up. You might start feeling like now it's your job to worry about their relationship, financial situation, or emotional health. Even though it can be hard to deal with parents not talking, or fighting all the time, know that it is their job to work it out themselves, and they are still responsible for parenting you together. The break-up is not your fault. It is also not your responsibility. You might have to remind your parents that they are still the adults, and that you expect them to act like it. (Don't be surprised if you have to remind them of this several times).

New Family Members- Come downstairs and meet your new brother!

Any family can have new additions – people are born, people re-marry and find new partners, people adopt children or foster kids come in and out, people bring old family members (in-laws, children, etc.) with them to their new families. Sometimes this is great. Sometimes this is less than great. You might dislike them or not understand why they have to be there in the first place. You might not feel comfortable with their rules or the way they cook food. You may not feel that you had any say in this change. If new family members are entering your home (or you are a new family member entering their home) it can be helpful to have a family meeting so that everyone is on the same page about what to expect. If there are going to be changes to rules or other family traditions, you deserve to know what they are, and you should have some chance to say how you feel about them. Even though it is a little disruptive sometimes, change can also be good. Maybe this new person can help teach you how to throw a football or teach you how to play an instrument. Maybe it turns out they cook BETTER than your dad. Try to be open-minded and if you have questions be sure to ask them. Try to give these people the benefit of the doubt – they probably want a happy family as much as you do, even if it does take some work.

Not Knowing Family Members-So who's your REAL mom and dad?

For many reasons, people with LGBTQ parents may not know one or more of their biological parents. People who were adopted may have spent all or most of their lives with the same parents but not know much about their birth parents. Most sperm banks are anonymous, so a lot of people conceived through donor insemination don't know much about their biological father. Other folks may simply have been born to, or mostly raised by, a single parent. No matter what the reason, those who don't know their biological mother and/or father will probably be questioned all the time about how you feel about this, if you want to meet the person, if you know anything about them, and if you regret that they are not in your life. This might even be one of those subjects where you get asked by other people so much you have hardly had time to really ask yourself about these questions. You might spend a lot of time thinking about these questions, and want to talk about it. Or, you might spend almost no time thinking about it and wonder why everyone else seems to care so much. A lot of folks say that they don't think very much about the parent(s) they don't know, but they do wonder if that person went on to have other children and if there are any siblings out there. In some cases there is simply no way to know this information – perhaps your mom did not know the name of the person she had that one night stand with, or the sperm bank or adoption agency do not have the records. In other cases, you do know the information but then have to decide



what to do about it. There's no simple formula for making this decision. If you have friends, family, and other folks with LGBTQ parents to help you decide, everything will be ok.

Dealing with Siblings- YOU DID WHAT!?!?!?!?

So let's say you don't want to tell a single soul that your mom is lesbian, you're happy with your decision, and you go to school the next day – only to find that your little sister has promptly told ALL of HER friends, and some of them have already told their older siblings! Before you decide that homicide is the only answer- breathe- find your happy quiet place and remember that, no matter what conflicts you might have, your sibling can be an important ally to you, and you can get in big trouble if you try to kill them. They are in the same family as you and are probably thinking and feeling a lot of the same things. You might have different approaches to it. Maybe you can learn from your sibling about how to come out to your friends. Maybe they can learn from you how to keep a secret for once! But family is family and it's important to try to find ways to support each other. Besides, you might want to borrow their car or sweater later in life.

Extended Family- Over the river and through the woods to grandmother's house we do or do not go.

So you're not allowed to wear the rainbow shirt to your Aunt's house and Grandpa goes on and on about "sissy men". If this sounds like your family reunion then welcome to the wonderful world of extended family. Sometimes you can feel like parts of your family exist in two separate worlds. Or maybe it is you who feels like the alien. Different kinds of families or different beliefs within a family can make you feel torn or divided and unable to find a happy middle ground. Whether you're "too supportive" or "not supportive enough", kids can often feel stuck between a rock and a hard place. All of us queerspawns have spent our share of time at tense family dinners, and quite a few of us have been excluded from them. If the thought of seeing your family makes your heart drop into your stomach, there are some things you can do to make it easier:

- Talk to your parents, siblings, and other members of your immediate family about what's going on with your extended family. If Aunt Tonya always has a bit too much to drink and then starts telling gay jokes, or if you worry that you will have to poke your cousin in the eye if he asks one more stupid question about your family, maybe these situations can be planned for and avoided, or maybe it is time for someone to step in and give you a hand.
- Have some standards – yes, it's your family. Yes, they are very important to you. And yes, it's important to stick by your family no matter what. But some things are never ok – verbal and physical abuse, threats, or attempts to turn you against your parent are NOT OK! You are allowed to say "no" to these things, even if it does mean standing up to grandma. In the end, having respectful relationships is worth it.
- Weddings, anniversaries, graduations, reunions, births, holidays and other milestones are often a reason for a large family gathering. You might want to spend a little time thinking about who all will be there and how they are likely to get along. Do you have allies in your family? Do you have somewhere to slip away to if things get rough? Do you have a plan for what to say if conversation steers in a gay direction? It helps to be prepared.

Language- I'd like you to meet my brother's mother's ex-partner's, genderqueer co-parent Keisha.

There is often no language to describe the many people in our families and how they relate to us, without launching into a paragraph-long explanation. Awkward conversations are only a small part of the problem. Many youth of LGBTQ parents struggle to figure out how to relate to the relatives of their non-biological parent. It is not always clear who is in our family and who isn't, and there aren't very many words around to clear things up. But we are helping to create this language by using it. Using new language pushes people to question their thoughts and stereotypes around old language. Even if you don't have words to use, there's nothing wrong with taking awhile to explain who everyone is and how they're related. This is your family! It can be a real education for the other person to realize that everything's not as simple as they might have thought before. When you are first trying to explain who is in your family and how it came to be, you might spend some time stammering and stuttering. Eventually you will find something that fits.



Dealing with Rejection- What about that whole ‘blood is thicker than water’ thing?

Sometimes, even though you have talked everything over a million times, planned ahead, taken deep breaths throughout hours of family dinners, talked about it, avoided talking about it, and even given them the PFLAG pamphlet, your family might reject you. Or, they might be so homophobic that your parent has rejected them. Perhaps you have decided on your own to end this relationship until you see certain changes. No matter how it happens, pulling apart from (or being forced out of) your family can be just awful. Even if it was your choice, and even if you feel kind of relieved to not have to deal with their homophobia anymore, most folks who have rejected or been rejected by their families have felt angry, sad, lonely, guilty, and betrayed. Even if you weren't being treated very well by them, it can feel like a huge loss when you are cut off from family. Just like with divorces, it's easy to blame yourself for not finding some way to make things work. But, just like with divorces, it's not your fault. If you have tried your best with this person and things still aren't working, sometimes taking a break from each other is actually the best and most loving thing you can do. And don't forget – things might change later.

Growing Up. One of the things that sometimes makes things change a lot is getting older. As you move into adulthood, many of your relationships with other family members might change. You might reconnect with family members that your parents usually avoided, or you might finally stop keeping in touch with someone who you never did get along with. You will have more choice and control about when and where you see your family, for how long, and how you want to be treated during that time. Although you are an adult, you will still probably need friends, and other adults with LGBTQ parents, to help you as you and your family change and grow.

FRIENDS

For many folks with LGBTQ parents, one of the biggest fears about having an LGBTQ parent is “What will my friends think? Will they stay my friend?” To “come out” about our family can be scary because a lot of people have hatred and fear about LGBTQ people and as children of LGBTQ people we might be hated or feared as well. It would be a big fat lie to say that this doesn't sometimes happen. Homophobia and transphobia are everywhere and can show their ugly heads anywhere. But we have a right to be proud of who we are. Other people might have less-than-perfect reactions to your family, but you will also find that a lot of people are loving and accepting when they are given a chance.

For the most part, giving someone a chance means “coming out” to them – telling them about your family. “Coming Out” doesn't just happen once, and it doesn't just mean to tell someone that your dad is gay or your mom is a lesbian. There are things that are associated with LGBTQ people that you have to tell, or not tell, also. Like using “she” to refer to your dad, explaining the rainbow sticker on your car, saying that your mom works for a gay and lesbian rights organization or that this weekend you're going to go to a Pride parade. The decision to come out about your family is one that has to be made constantly. Sometimes you make different decisions because of the situation you are in.

This is what other folks with LGBTQ parents have had to say about telling:

“One time a friend of mine made a joke about gay people. I just played it off like I thought it was funny, but I didn't. You have to pretend that you think the same thing they do when you don't. That makes me feel like a fraud.” -- Chip

“I think I've told three. Patty, who used to be my best friend, knew because I told her, and the other two just kind of asked me about it. They guessed, because my mom didn't see any guys and I never talked about her having boyfriends or anything. When I told them, they just said, ‘Oh that's cool.’ We only talked about it a couple of times.” -- Megan



"I've never found my mother's being gay to be a problem with my friends, although I haven't told a lot of people about it. Sometimes I felt embarrassed about her. My closest friends wouldn't say anything about it unless I wanted to talk." -- Jessica

Talking about your family is something that only you can decide how to do, or when to do it. If you want to never tell anyone, you don't have to. If you want to tell everyone in the entire world, you can. Both tactics have their risks and benefits. You might find that the effort of keeping a secret is not worth the risks of telling. Or maybe you tell people all the time, and want to figure out a way to make it go more smoothly. Either way, here are some things to keep in mind if and when you decide to "come out".

Before You Tell- "My dad's ggggggggaaa....."

- Check in with yourself. How do you feel about "it"? If you are not comfortable with "it", or talking about "it", (or can only talk about "it" by using the word "it"), you might have a harder time having a conversation about "it" with someone else.
- Check in with your parent(s). Are they out? Ask them about how they came out, or how they feel about not being out.
- Find out how the person you want to tell feels about LGBTQ people or LGBTQ rights. Do they even know what "homosexual" or "transgender" means? This can help you guess what kind of reaction you might get.
- Think about what you want to say and then write it down. Practice in your head or with a stuffed animal. The more practice you have the more confident you'll be.
- Think about the worst possible reaction you can imagine, or the one you are the most afraid of. Then think about the best thing that might happen. Finally, decide what you think is the most realistic thing to expect. You can plan ahead for your 'worst', 'best' and 'likely' situations.
- Someone who already knows and likes you is less likely to "flip out" when they find out about your parent(s). So maybe tell your closest or most trust-worthy friends first. If you are new in school, wait until you make some good core friends.

When You Tell-It's 2:15pm and the suns are alined: I think now is when I should come out....

- Invite people over to your house, and just answer questions honestly as they come up. Questions like, "Why doesn't your dad's friend have his own bedroom?" or "Why are there rainbow magnets on your refrigerator?" can open a chance to talk with your friend about your parent(s).
- Have a direct conversation. Decide what you want to say beforehand. Practice in your head or with a stuffed animal. Then take a deep breath, and go for it!
- If you have two parents, or your mom or dad dates, introductions are a good place to tell someone 'right off the bat.' Just say, "This is my dad and his partner, James," or "This is my mom and that's her date," or "Him? He's my mother." That way, if the person has a bad reaction you can just move on and you don't have to get to know them anymore.
- Bring your friend with you to an event that you are attending in the LGBTQ community, such as a comedy show, pride event, or to see the AIDS quilt. Your friend can get educated and you can have fun together at the same time.
- Let COLAGE help! Join our Facebook group and ask other folks for advice about how to tell. Come to the camp we put on called Family Week to make new friends with families like yours. Get a t-shirt to wear to school (or just around the house!) Start a COLAGE chapter in your area so that other people can learn from your experience.



Ways to Tell- Carla there's something I've been meaning to tell you...

- Have a direct conversation. Take a deep breath and go for it. An ice breaker might be "Have you ever seen the movie "watermelon woman"?" or "so you know how my dad has really great fashion...?"

- Answer questions honestly as they come up. Questions like, “Why doesn’t your dad’s friend have his own bedroom?” or “Why are there rainbow magnets on your refrigerator?” can open a chance to talk with your friend about your parent(s).
- If you have two parents, or your mom or dad dates, introductions are a good place to tell someone ‘right off the bat.’ Just say, “This is my dad and his partner, Jose,” or “This is my mom and that’s her date,” or “Him? He’s my mother.”
- Bring your friend with you to an event that you are attending in the LGBT community, such as a film, pride event, or to see the AIDS quilt. Your friend can get educated and you can have fun together at the same time.

After Telling- So Now That I’m Out...Can We Go To Disneyland to Celebrate?

- Pat yourself on the back! No matter how it went, you just did a very brave thing! Congratulations.
- Maybe this will be a solo trip to Disneyland. If the person you told reacted badly, give them a little time. Remember, it might have taken you some time to get used to it as well. They might need some space to think things over.
- You have a right to be honest about your family, and you should never feel that is wrong. But, you also have a right to privacy about your family. After you tell, people might ask you questions. You don’t have to answer them if they are rude, or too personal, or even if you just don’t want to. It’s also ok if you don’t know the answer.

Not Telling- To tell or not to tell, that is it the question...

- It’s ok to decide not to tell. This can be a one-time decision (I choose not to tell this person about my family) or a basic principle (I won’t tell anyone about my family).
- “Not Telling” can be really hard. Sometimes we might have to lie, or bend the truth in order to not tell. We might have to pretend we only have one parent, or hide the books and magazines in our house, or refuse to invite our friends over. It’s easy to feel bad about yourself when you’re “not telling,” or you might worry about hurting your parents’ feelings or making them angry. It’s a really hard thing to figure out. Just remember, you’re not alone. We all, even the “most out” among us, have decided at some point or another to Not Tell. Remember that you can always turn to COLAGE for help and advice. It is not your responsibility to stand up for your parents or explain their identity and their choices to anyone.
- Be open to changing your mind. If you’ve decided not to tell – that’s ok! Maybe you don’t have any friends right now who you want to tell, or maybe where you live is not very accepting. But if you end up moving, or making different friends, you might change your mind and that’s ok too.

Some other Things about Friends and Telling- Pssst, did you hear about

- It should always be your decision about whether or not to tell. Unfortunately, sometimes someone else decided to tell for us. Maybe the person did not realize it was a secret, or did not know about “transphobia” and “homophobia.” Or maybe the person even meant to tell, and they were trying to embarrass and hurt you. Either way, they shouldn’t have told without your permission. Since this sometimes happens, you might want to think ahead of time about what you will do if someone finds out who you did not plan to tell.
- What if we tell our friend, and that is ok, but later they tell their parents and the parents have a transphobic or homophobic reaction? This can be almost as hard as if the friend reacted badly:



“The first friend I lost because I had two moms I actually lost because her parents said she couldn’t come over to my house anymore. We were in 8th grade. We knew that our opinions and families and religions were very different, but we actually enjoyed the differences. Her parents did not enjoy the differences. They said that if my friend was at my house, my parents’ gayness would “rub off.” She and I got into a pretty big fight about it, because after that I didn’t want to come to her house, either. The friendship was over, and that was really sad for me.” -- Jesse, 22

Sometimes parents just have a lot to learn! As kids, we have to teach them. Remember that your friend is dealing with something hard, too – they really like you, but their parent(s) don’t understand. If there’s one

thing we know, it's that dealing with parents can be hard! It's not your fault, or your parents' fault, that this is happening – but if you can, try to put yourself in your friends' shoes too.

- One of the best ways to make friends who you know will stick up for you, is for you to stick up for other people. This can be scary to do – but just remember how it feels when you are being teased. Wouldn't it be nice if someone put a stop to it, or said they disagreed? The next time you see someone getting picked on, stand up for them! It will feel good, and eventually someone might return the favor!

School

Other than your own house, you probably spend the most amount of time in school, interacting with classmates, friends, teachers, and administrators. It is probably one of the areas where you will most often feel the tension of having an LGBTQ parent, as well as one of the places where you may be most able to take action (see world on pg 16) Before we delve into the many fun and exciting challenges that can come up at school, let's stop to say a few words about bullying and harassment.

Harassment on the basis of your real or perceived sexual orientation, or that of your parent or guardian is wrong and should never be tolerated. If you live in the United States, it is most likely also ILLEGAL for you to be harassed in school. Many states have rules that protect you specifically on the basis of sexual orientation, but even states that do not have these rules are still bound to rules that prohibit different forms of violence. Students from around the country whose schools failed to protect them from bullying have successfully sued their school districts. **Harassment** includes (but is not limited to!) any or all of the following: physical violence or threats of physical violence; name-calling, taunting, teasing, spreading rumors; property damage, vandalism, and graffiti; stalking, following, and other forms of intimidation; blackmail; and (in some cases) exclusion or ostracization from school activities or groups. From a teacher or administrator, harassment might also look like: differential granting of privilege or consequences; inappropriate remarks or gestures; breaking confidentiality or attempting to embarrass you in front of peers/classmates; and unfair grading practices.

If you are being harassed in school, there are a number of organizations that can help you determine what strategy might best address your specific situation. You will probably have to do a mixture of *education* about LGBTQ issues and your right to a violence-free learning environment; *advocacy* for prompt and effective changes that protect you from further violence; and *prevention* that ensures that the resources are in place to protect future queerspawn from harassment. Although it can be difficult, do not be afraid to be proactive about this issue. You are not asking anyone for a favor. You have the legal and ethical right to safety, and your school is responsible for creating an environment where you are able to learn.

Resources w/ contact info for: GLSEN, Safe Schools Coalition, Southern Poverty Law Center's teaching tolerance site, GSA Network, and National Coalition on Community Justice (NCCJ). See our resources page for their contact information (pg 17).

Other School Issues

Although bullying is often the first concern people have when they think of school, it is not the only time that our identities come into play. Almost every person with an LGBTQ parent remembers quite clearly the first time they were given a family tree with one root labeled "mother" and the other "father," or how they felt trying to explain their lack of participation in (or the creation of two gifts for!) mother's or father's day.

One youth remembers, "I was in health class and the teacher asked, 'Does anyone know how many kinds of families there are?' I thought it was one of those really obvious trick questions and piped up, 'There are INFINITE kinds of families!' The teacher looked at me quite strangely and replied, 'No...there are three!' And then we had to all turn to the page and read about three types of families..."

This kind of thing can happen in school all the time – in art class you must get your "mother and father" to both sign a permission slip to go to a museum next week; in health class you are doing a unit on families and keep watching movies about heterosexual couples choosing to get married or learning to communicate better; in Spanish class you must write an essay describing your family and read it aloud to the class; in social studies you

are debating same-sex marriage; on your football team the parents will escort the players onto the field in a special appreciation ceremony during the next game; you are sick and the only person who can come pick you up is your parent's boyfriend or girlfriend; your homeroom teacher wants volunteers for 'class moms and dads'; there are announcements for joining the PTA, parent-teacher conferences, family nights...the list of scenarios goes on and on! Whether you are 'out' about your family or not, school can be a place where your queerspawn survival skills are constantly put to the test.

Everyone's school is different, and school is a big enough part of your life that we would not pretend to know exactly what you should do in your situation. What you are able to do will depend on the support and resources you have available to you. Here are some useful tips and strategies to consider:

- **Your survival comes first.** Don't feel like you have to fight every battle, or that you have to win every fight. Sometimes you just won't have the time and energy, and you want to make sure you are doing things that make you happy. There will always be time to be an advocate if you so choose to. Remember to go at your own pace.
- **Your teachers may not realize that the activities they are doing are exclusive,** or they might not know how to make them more inclusive. There are a lot of teaching resources that help educators develop curricula, deal with their co-workers, deal with other parents, and make their classroom (and the whole school!) one that is safe for and encouraging of diversity. It takes a lot of work, so they will need your support, and the support of other students, teachers, and parents. Have them contact COLAGE for more resources.
- **Decide if you want to get your parents involved.** Certainly there are times when we do not want our parents involved – maybe we want more independence from them, or maybe we worry that they would just make things worse. But sometimes administrators and teachers will listen to a parent where they will not listen to a student. The PTA and similar organizations can be very powerful in affecting the policies and overall atmosphere at your school.
- **Attend school board meetings.** School board members are elected public leaders. They are responsible to the communities they serve, which includes you (the student) and your family. Their meetings are open and most will include a time for questions or comments from the public.
- **Survey your school.** Conduct an assessment of your school's environment when it comes to transphobia and homophobia. You can use information about harassment, anti-gay slurs, LGBTQ information in the curricula, and perceptions of LGBTQ students and teachers and family members to influence your school to take action to make the halls safer or push for other types of changes.
- **Support other students, too.** Other people who do not have LGBTQ parents might also have difficulties in school. Bullying is connected to prejudice, so lots of young people get teased for how they talk, their race or ethnicity, how they dress, how much money they have, having a disability, or for their religious beliefs. These students might also have trouble with how the school operates – for example, having all of the textbooks in English, or charging money to play sports or go on field trips. When you stand up for other students, you are also standing up for yourself, sending a clear message again and again that schools have to be safe for and welcome everyone.

Community

There can be good and bad things about most communities and finding a place where you feel that you belong can sometimes be hard. You might feel excluded from a community you really want to fit in to, or you might feel forced into a community where you would rather not be. Here are some thoughts we have on some of the most common questions of community that come up for folks with LGBTQ parents.

Neighborhood

The different places we live in can change our experiences. The same family living in a big city, a town, or in a rural area might have completely different experiences from each other. Living in the Midwest is different from living in the South and both of these are different from living in New England. Even families living in different sections of the same city may not feel that they have much in



common. Yet, wherever we live, we must figure out a way to be at home. We want to feel welcomed by our neighbors and feel that we have places where we belong and things we like to do. For some some this is not too difficult, others may not feel that connection very easily. By far, the most typical obstacle most people face is that their **town/city/state is too transphobic and homophobic**. Perhaps it seems like people avoid looking you in the eye, or your family has trouble conducting their day-to-day business openly. Maybe your home has been vandalized or your next-door neighbors mistreat you. There are many ways that we can be made to feel unwelcome in our neighborhoods, and it can be very tiresome to feel like an outcast every time you leave the house. Here's some tips on "coming out" of exile:

- **Forget the people:** Ok, so maybe everyone is kind of a jerk. You can still have a good time. Parks, clubs, hiking, rivers, biking, running, fishing, swimming, tagging, exploring, museums, movies, mischief, cafes – no matter the size of your town, there are a million things to do that you can enjoy on your own, or with your close circle.
- **Community within a community:** Even if it is hard to find them, there really are probably at least a couple other like-minded people living near you. If you don't have anyone to hang out with try joining or starting a club. It doesn't have to be LGBTQ or COLAGE related. It could be a gardening club, skateboarding crew, or book group. You are bound to find some people who you have something in common with.
- **Get online:** If you don't have the internet at home, check out your public library to get hooked up. If there's not a lot of folks at home who you have much in common with, you might be able to find at least one email discussion list that interests you. You can also design your own website, publish writing and artwork, search for things to do in your area, and chat with long-distance friends.
- **Get involved:** volunteer work and community service are great ways to connect to where you live and the people you live with. Even if they are wary of your family, they will have respect for your desire to give back to the local area, and they will get to know you beyond their prejudice.

Religion

For many LGBTQ people and for those who love and support them, the very word "religion" is linked to memories or fears of persecution and condemnation. But it would be a mistake to assume that religion and spirituality are not important to LGBTQ people, their children, and our families. It would also be a mistake to assume that religion always involves fear and persecution. Organized religion was crucial to the success of the civil rights movement, and many religious and spiritual leaders have been active in speaking out against various forms of injustice.

Because of the association between organized religion and transphobia/homophobia many of us struggle to find or create a spiritual path that allows us to be true to ourselves and our families. If religion and faith are important parts of your life, and you are worried that you will not be able to participate in your faith community because of your parent, don't despair. For those of us who practice some religion or faith, we have found that with a little creativity and extra searching, we can find a way to connect to a higher power on our own terms.

- **Don't Believe the Hype.** Goddess, creator, Jesus, The Source, Allah, God, gods...whatever you call it or however you understand it, know that these 'higher powers' are not on the side of a particular political party. Morality does not equal bigotry. Religion does not equal hate. Love is not sinful. The first step to finding your own spiritual connection is to let go of all the times you've been told that you will not be welcome in faith communities and that you are not able to be a spiritual person. It is up to you to make your own relationships and form your own opinions – you don't have to accept what other people say god is all about.
- **Enlightenment for One, Please.** Although it is not always the same, there are many ways to have spiritual practice without a community – prayer, meditation, and ritual can all take place with groups of one or two. Solitary practice can sustain you while you are looking for other people who share your beliefs.
- **Family Values Rainbow Style.** You may be able to find other people who share your beliefs, including your support of LGBTQ inclusion. If there are no such communities in your area, they can be found online. There are congregations, temples, and many other faith-based organizations that are specifically working to increase the acceptance of LGBTQ people in their own religious institutions.

While homophobic people might base their beliefs on religion, no one can take away from you your own understanding of God, life, or the sacred. You join millions in placing great importance on finding a spiritual path that works for you.

Race

Race and racism are present everywhere in our society. Prejudice, lack of information, fear, hatred, and privilege often divide our society into categories: straight people and gay people, white people and people of color, rich people and poor people. Even though this guide talks mostly about homophobia, we (and COLAGE) know that many LGBTQ families are dealing with issues other than transphobia and homophobia too. Race and racism are two of the biggest.

For many youth with LGBTQ parents of color, important community is found with people who share our racial or ethnic background. You may even organize where you live, where you practice your religion(s), and where you work around this community. For families that experience racism on a daily basis, solidarity and connection with other people of color is an important part of coping with and responding to prejudice and discrimination.

At the same time, having LGBTQ parents might make you feel separated from your racial or ethnic community, or you might be told you are betraying your culture, history, or religion by supporting your LGBTQ parent or guardian. If LGBTQ communities that you have had contact with are majority white, you might feel isolated as a person of color, or as a member of a multi-racial family. Often, there is no representation in pop culture or the media that would show cooperation between LGBTQ people (who are often portrayed as white) and people of color (who are often portrayed as straight). It might start to feel like, no matter where you are, some part of you doesn't fit in and will have to be silenced.

Our whole community is affected by attacks on any one part of it. So even if you are white, and not part of a multi-racial family, don't skip this page. Even if we as white people don't experience racism directly, we still share our community with people who do. White people benefit from white privilege and must learn to challenge the systems of racism that hold up our society. In order to be a better ally to people of color, take the time to learn more about their experience. You might realize a way that you can make our communities more inclusive and accepting of everyone.

Here are some common challenges for multiracial families and folks of color with LGBTQ parents:

I really am the only one. It can be hard to feel like you are "a minority within a minority." It is lonely to so rarely meet other people who share your experiences. Don't despair! There are lots of other people like you and families like yours. Many LGBTQ people of color are parents. According to the 2010 census, LGBTQ people of color are actually more likely to be parents than white LGBTQ people. An estimated 50% of youth living in same-sex households are youth of color. Additionally, many LGBTQ families are multi-racial. Sometimes this happens because people of different racial or ethnic backgrounds decide to parent together. Sometimes it happens because the parents decide to adopt or foster a child who is not from the same background as they are. If you haven't met another youth with LGBTQ parents of color or another person from a multi-racial LGBTQ family yet, that doesn't mean that they're not out there.

They don't believe that s/he is my parent. Many youth who have a different racial or ethnic background than their parents encounter 'double jeopardy' when trying to define their own family. Just as some people don't recognize same-sex parents and their kids as family, some people also have trouble recognizing a racially mixed group as a family. Strangers may assume that one or more of your parents is actually a maid or nanny. They may act shocked or incredulous when they find out about your family. You might find you get the same questions over and over again about where you came from and who is your 'real' parent. This can make you feel like you have to justify who you are. It can also put strain on your relationships with individual family members.

I identify with a culture/group, but they don't accept me as one of them. If you are growing up in a family where there are diverse racial and cultural roots, you may find that you are familiar and identify with many different cultural practices. Yet, you might not fit other people's image, or stereotype, of what someone from that culture looks like. You might feel that you have to "prove yourself" when you meet people on the streets or at school. You might show up at events 'for X people' and find that people there don't believe that you are "X". This can make you feel separated from an important part of your heritage and family life.

I have trouble talking to my parents about racism. There are many youth who are not white but are being raised by white parents in a primarily white environment. Many white parents who are raising children who are not white have given some thought and planning to how they will talk about and respond to racism and how racism might affect their child. However, even white people who have done this work may still have “blind spots” or things they don’t know about. They may not recognize something that happens to you as racism, even though it is. They may recognize it as racism but not have any idea what to say or do about it. They may say racist things themselves, or fail to speak up when their friends or family members do. When this starts to happen too often, it can cause a lot of distance and hard feelings between family members. It can be confusing to feel like you leave the house and go into a different reality than your parents even understand.

I don’t feel comfortable in LGBTQ spaces because of race and racism. Despite all of the Wizard of Oz jokes, “somewhere over the rainbow” may not be as much of a dream land as it’s cracked up to be when it comes to supporting LGBTQ people of color and their families. The most common complaint is that LGBTQ spaces are majority (or entirely) white. In a world where we are encouraged to be “color blind” some people would say that this shouldn’t matter. But we know it does. Walking into a room and thinking “I’m the only one” is never a pleasant feeling. It makes sense for you to ask yourself “Why are there not more people of color here? Is it a coincidence, or is there something about this space that makes it uncomfortable to people who aren’t white?” When you think about and notice these things, you are thinking about your comfort and safety. Bringing up a concern that a space is all white is not the same thing as “racism.”

I don’t feel comfortable in spaces for people who share my race or ethnicity because of homophobia or transphobia. It is a common stereotype that communities of color are “more homophobic” than white communities. This is not true – homophobia can be found pretty much everywhere that gay people can be found (that means everywhere!). But because we don’t want to make our communities look bad, this stereotype can make it difficult for us to talk about what to do when we do experience homophobia from other people of color and mixed people.

Here are some ways to keep your head above water:

- Because LGBTQ people of color are often so invisible, many people assume that they don’t exist. They do exist, and so do we, their children. LGBTQ people of color have made significant contributions to art, politics, and history. Learning about this can help us feel pride in our community. To get started, go to <http://www.bwmtdc.org/links.htm>
- It’s ok to make your own, more specific, group if what exists isn’t working for you. Maybe you don’t want a general group for people with LGBTQ parents. Maybe you’d like to meet other biracial youth with queer parents. Maybe you’d like to meet other people of color whose parents are white. Whether you want to do this as a COLAGE chapter or just a one-time event, it is ok to create safe spaces for your community, however you define it.
- Be a bridge. By belonging to two or more communities that might not usually relate much, you are educating everyone in all of those communities about what they have in common with each other. You can be an important source of information and support as they work to be more open to each other.
- Don’t be a bridge. You CAN be an important source of information and support, but you don’t HAVE to be. You shouldn’t have to always be speaking for or representing one community to another and you shouldn’t have to educate people who are ignorant of who you are and where you’re coming from. If you are fed up with answering questions or making connections, take a break, take care of yourself, and let people figure things out for themselves for once.
- Ask for More. If you don’t think that the LGBTQ people you know are doing a good job of addressing racism, or you don’t think that the communities of color you know are addressing homophobia, know that you deserve better. You deserve to be fully welcome in all of these communities. Don’t be afraid to criticize, get involved, or ask for more.

Bill of Rights for Racially Mixed People

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

Not to justify my existence in this world.

Not to keep the races separate within me.

Not to be responsible for people's discomfort with my physical ambiguity.
Not to justify my ethnic legitimacy.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To identify myself differently than strangers expect me to identify.
To identify myself differently from how my parents identify me.
To identify myself differently from my brothers and sisters.
To identify myself differently in different situations.

I HAVE THE RIGHT...

To create a vocabulary to communicate about being multiracial.
To change my identity over my lifetime -- and more than once.
To have loyalties and identification with more than one group of people.
To freely choose whom I befriend and love.

You do not have to choose between your different identities and communities. All of them are part of you and you belong to them. If you are feeling 'forced out' of a community – whether it's your church, neighborhood, culture, or organization – remember that you are still a valuable person who has a lot to offer.

Here are some ways to Explore and Expand Your Community Involvement

Hit The Books: History, biography, folklore, music, art, spirituality, and geography are all subjects that might help you trace your, your family's, and your community's roots. If you are feeling like you are the "only one" – the only Mormon queerspawn, the only Asian-American with a trans parent, the only second generation Muslim, or whatever other category you feel isolated in – history can be a place to find community and come to know yourself better.

Involve Your Family and Friends: When you're ready, talking to your family and/or friends can be very helpful, especially if they might be dealing with the same stuff you are. They can share their own insights and opinions and may be able to offer support.

Be A Guest: If you are curious about your own or other faiths, cultures, communities, or organizations, check them out in person. Go to a Latino Arts festival, join an LGBTQ gospel group, or do something else that connects you to people you like and respect. The best method for finding fun events is through word of mouth from someone you trust. Take a friend and see firsthand what it's all about.

Create Change From Within: Perhaps you yourself are comfortable with your many communities, but the communities themselves have not yet openly welcomed LGBTQ families or people. Some people find that an excellent way to fight oppression and invisibility is to stand up and do something about it. If your church/temple, youth group, or neighborhood groups are disapproving of – or simply silent about – LGBTQ families, you might want to let them know you're there. Speak to community leaders and peers about your family and answer their questions. You may find there are a lot of potential allies.

World

Why do we as people with LGBTQ parents feel compelled to change the world around us? What do we have to gain? What do we have to offer? For almost all of us we look at the world and see some pretty crummy things – maybe no one where we live seems to have enough money, or maybe our water and air is polluted. With all the same-sex marriage talk, we often see our families directly in the line of fire.

We as children have a lot to gain by speaking up for our families. We as children have a lot to offer when we get involved to make the world a better place. Injustice is deeply rooted in ignorance and the more we can fight that ignorance with education and action the safer we are in our schools and communities. Often we



may hear things like “We can’t let gays get married because then they’ll have kids and mess them up”. Or we might get the message that we cannot make a difference because we are too young. Our voices are missing in this argument. We already exist and live with parents who love us and care for us. We are already making a difference.

If you are looking for some ways to get involved in advocacy work, here are some ideas:

Activism

Education fights ignorance. Talk to your friends and peers and educate them about your family issues that are important to you. You will be amazed about the effect that telling your story and sharing what you have learned can have. Start small by talking to people you know or people in your school. Write a report on homophobia or racism or the environment. Join/Create a GSA. Consider starting a COLAGE chapter in your area.

Media

Another way to educate is through the media. Write a letter to the editor of your local newspaper. Tell them how legislation and transphobia affect you and your family. Or even contact the local news channel and see if they want to do a human interest story on your family. The media can be a great way to get your message to a large audience.

Allies

In the fight for equality kids with LGBTQ parents are not alone. Our families are not the only ones that face discrimination. It’s important for us to realize how many people are working towards equality and to use them as allies. It’s also important to figure out how you can be an ally to other people. Even a small act, like standing up for someone else, attending another organization’s programs, or listening to someone’s story can build a bridge between diverse communities.

Don’t forget about COLAGE!

While you’re tackling all of these issues, don’t forget:

- COLAGE has a very active Facebook community where you can reach out to others, ask questions, find more resources and connect to the larger community around the country! We also have a virtual chapter through Facebook that provides a confidential smaller forum for folks who have LGBTQ parents to connect. www.facebook.com/colage
- COLAGE has chapters all over the country – there might be one near you! If not, we can help you start one in your city, town, county, or region. <http://www.colage.org/colage-chapter/>
- COLAGE has resources for your parents, and we know about organizations that are just for them!
- COLAGE has lots more resources for dealing with schools, friends, family, community, and world than just what is found in this guide – just write us and ask for help! robin@colage.org or (855) 4-COLAGE ext.
- Check out our website www.colage.org

COLAGE Chapters

Join or start a COLAGE chapter in your area. One of the greatest challenges reported by youth with LGBTQ parents is a sense of isolation, alone-ness, or feeling that “they are the only one.” When youth with LGBTQ families get together, regardless of what we actually do or say, it’s a positive experience that can’t be underestimated. Providing COLAGE support and programming on local levels provides a tool for countering this isolation by creating communities of people with LGBTQ parents. When we are connected to a community of peers that share their experiences, they become strong advocates for themselves and their families. Participants in COLAGE often share that being able to connect with others who have similar families, backgrounds, and experiences not only increased their family pride and self-esteem, but allowed them to see themselves as part of a supportive and dynamic community and to find their place in the LGBTQ movement.

THE END...

...Naw just kidding. There is no way this could be the end. It’s just the beginning. To tell you that once you have read everything in this resource everything will be all better would be a lie. The fact is you will always have feelings and situations you will encounter because your family is unique. Some will happen over and over again

and others you won't ever have to deal with. We definitely tried to put as much information in here as our tree hugging minds could stomach but there is so much more to be said. This resource is just the tip of the iceberg but we hope that it has given you some good ideas and helped you see that what you might be feeling is totally normal and common. If you're still feeling a little confused or not quite sure about what to do, below are a bunch of great websites and other resources that you should check out.

Organizations that COLAGE LOVES!

Youth Specific Organizations

Advocates for Youth: Helps young people make informed and responsible decisions about their reproductive and sexual health. www.advocatesforyouth.org

Camp Ten Trees: Pacific Northwest summer camp with sessions for youth from LGBTQ families. www.camptentrees.org

Community Network for Youth Development is based in the Bay Area although their website has resources about youth programming for after school programs which can be educational for anyone who works with young people. <http://www.cnyd.org/trainingtools/index.php>

Families Like Mine: www.familieslikemine.com

Fierce: Building the leadership and power of LGBTQ youth of color. www.fiercenydc.org

Gay & Lesbian Advocates & Defenders (GLAD): www.glad.org

Gay, Lesbian, Straight Education Network (GLSEN): Works to create safe schools for LGBTQ people. www.glsen.org

Gay-Straight Alliance Network: Works to empower youth activists to make change in schools. Their website has resources for running groups that may be helpful to your chapter. www.gsanetwork.org

KASA- Kids As Self Advocates. A national project by and for youth with disabilities. <http://www.fvkasa.org/>

National Youth Advocacy Coalition: Primarily supports LGBTQ youth through their website; has many organizing tools and resources. www.nyacyouth.org

National Youth Development Information Center. This group provides resources youth workers about funding, programming, research, policy, job and training opportunities. <http://www.nydic.org/nydic/index.html>

National Youth Leadership Network: Only national youth-led organization that works to build power among people with disabilities. www.nyln.org

National Youth Rights Association is a youth led organization that challenges age discrimination. Their website has papers, articles and resources about youth leadership and ageism. <http://www.youthrights.org/>

LGBTQ and Allied Rights Organizations

ACLU Lesbian and Gay Rights Project: www.aclu.org/lgbt/index.html

Al Fatiha Foundation: Support for LGBTQ Muslims. www.al-fatiha.org

Center Link: A great national resource to find the LGBTQ Center closest to you www.LGBTcenters.org.

Class Action is an organization that inspires action to end classism. Their website has resources, both online and print, on classism in the US: www.classism.org

Color Lines Magazine is the national newsmagazine on race and politics. They have many articles about race and current affairs in the US. <http://www.colorlines.com/>

Family Equality Council: Family Equality Council advocates for family equality nationwide. www.familyequality.org

Fat! So? Resources around body acceptance and sizism include a website, book, and many links to other resources. <http://www.fatso.com/>

Gayyellow Pages or Lavender Pages (LGBTQ phone books): www.gayyellowpages.com

Gender Odyssey: An international conference focused on the needs and interests of transgender and gender non-conforming people, with specific programming for families. www.genderodyssey.org

GLAAD: Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation: A great resource especially for finding gay-friendly media in your area. www.glaad.org

Human Rights Campaign Family Project: Provides resources, articles, and information that are pertinent to LGBTQ families. www.hrc.org/issues/parenting/10475.htm

Lambda Legal Defense and Education Fund: Legal resources for the LGBTQ community. www.lambdalegal.org

Local Gay Parenting Groups: There are local groups for LGBTQ parents across the country. Here is a list of LGBTQ parents' groups state-by state: www.familyequality.org/action/parentsgroups.html.

Metropolitan Community Churches: MCC Churches work with the LGBTQ community. They are a great resource to connect with and have provided meeting space in the past. www.mccchurch.org

North American Council on Adoptable Children: Adoptive rights organization that has great resources surrounding the rights of transnationally and transracially adopted children. www.nacac.org

National Black Justice Coalition: a civil rights organization dedicated to empowering Black same-gender-loving, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people. www.nbjcoalition.org

National Center for Lesbian Rights: Legal resources and referrals. www.nclrights.org

National Gay and Lesbian Task Force: www.thetaskforce.org

National Queer Asian Pacific Islander Alliance: www.nqapia.org

Our Families is a community-based education project that raised the visibility, experiences and public support of LGBT families of color within predominantly straight communities of color www.basicrights.org/ourfamilies/

PFLAG (Parents, Friends, and Family of Lesbians and Gays): PFLAG has chapters across the world, many of whom provide programming for youth with LGBTQ parents. www.pflag.org

Safe Schools Coalition: based in Washington State, maintains a website filled with resources, organizations, curriculum and more that help builds safer schools for all youth. <http://www.safeschoolscoalition.org/>

Straight Spouse Network: www.straightspouse.org

Teaching Tolerance. This website has activities and curriculum on a broad level of topics and categorized for different aged groups. www.tolerance.org

Unid@s: National Latina/o LGBT Human Rights Organization. www.unidoslgbt.com

Unitarian Office of Bisexual, Gay, Lesbian & Transgender Concerns: www.uua.org/obgltc

World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, and Bisexual Jewish Organizations: www.glbttjews.org

Vocabulary

Here are some pretty important definitions of terms that we will use often in this guide and that you might hear day to day and not know exactly what they are. These are only some of the most used terms – the people you hang out with might have different words, or maybe you have even made up some of your own! It is not unusual to come up with our own words and expressions to describe our unique families and experiences.

Ally: When used in a context of social justice and anti-oppression, an ally is a member of a dominant group who works to end the system of oppression that gives them greater privilege and power based on their membership in that dominant group.

Bisexual: People whose attraction to others is fluid between same-sex and different-sex partners.

Cisgender: A term used to describe people whose gender identity is the same as the sex they were assigned at birth; a person who is not transgender.

The Closet: Someone is said to be “in the closet” if they have not revealed that they are LGBTQ, or in our case, if they have not revealed that they have an LGBTQ parent or family.

COLAGER: A child, youth, or adult with one or more parents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

Coming Out: When someone decides to be open about their sexuality, or the sexuality or gender identity of their parent or family member, that is called “coming out,” as in “coming out of the closet.”

Culturally queer: Culturally queer is a term used by people who feel that they have a strong connection to queer/LGBTQ culture. It is a way of recognizing that you might belong to the LGBTQ community without being LGBTQ yourself.

Donor Insemination: When sperm is donated from either a known or anonymous donor in order to create a baby. A less loaded term than "artificial insemination" that is inclusive of many ways that people are choosing to create children.

Gay: Someone who is primarily attracted to people of their same sex, most commonly used to describe men.

Genderqueer: A broad term to describe those who do are transgender or do not completely identify with any gender. A genderqueer person may also identify as male or female but find that those terms are not fully inclusive of that person's gender identity.

Heteronormativity: The tendency to marginalize, persecute, or make invisible any behavior, belief, or lifestyle that deviates from the socially-accepted and enforced model of heterosexuality and the gender binary.

Heterosexuality: A designation for an emotional/sexual orientation towards people of the "opposite" gender; straight.

Homonormativity: The tendency to project heteronormative values onto behavior, relationships, and family models within the queer community. At times, this may be a matter of assimilating heterosexual values into a queer context and/or community (i.e., the assumption that COLAGERs all have "two moms" or "two dads" without a thought to other family structures such as those that include single or multiple parents).

Homophobia: The fear, dislike, and hatred of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people. Homophobia comes in many forms. Homophobia in government results in discriminatory laws and unequal rights. Homophobia in communities (like towns, clubs, faith groups, or schools) results in gay and lesbian people having to stay "in the closet" and cut off from their peers, neighbors, and classmates. On an individual level, homophobia might result in harassment, personal conflict, or even violence.

Homosexuality: A designation for an emotional/sexual orientation towards people of the same gender; a gay or lesbian sexual orientation.

Intersex: The term used to describe people who naturally are born with or later show secondary sex characteristics that do not fit within societal definitions of male or female.

Lesbian: A woman (self-identified) who is primarily attracted to women (self-identified).

Pansexuality: A designation for an emotional and/or sexual orientation towards people regardless of gender.

Queer: A broad term for those who do not identify as straight, or otherwise feel that they do not fit within the restrictive definition of heteronormative sexuality. Because the word "queer" was for a long time used a derogatory term, many people, particularly older ones, still do not like its use; however, others, mostly younger people in the LGBTQ community, have reclaimed it as a powerful term of solidarity in large part because of its lack of specificity (see also queerspawn).

Queerspawn: A term that some people with LGBTQ parents use to describe themselves, meaning the spawn (offspring) of queer people.

Questioning: Someone who is questioning might be at a point where they don't know for sure if they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or straight. Or, they might believe that they are gay or straight, but are also interested in exploring other types of attractions and relationships.

Second Generation: Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and/or question people who also have one or more LGBTQIA+ parent.

Transgender: An umbrella term describing people whose gender identity and/or expression does not align with the sex they were assigned at birth. Literally means "across gender", and conveys the idea of transcending the boundaries of the gender binary system.

Transphobia: The fear, dislike, and hatred of trans people (transgender, transsexual genderqueer). Transphobia can be expressed in many ways: in government it means that trans people are not allowed to change their name or sex, and are not protected by existing laws that address homophobia or sexism. On a community level, transphobia is expressed by the definition of trans people as mentally ill, and the abuse of trans people by police, doctors, and other service providers. On an individual level, transphobia is expressed through violence (both verbal and physical), and other forms of mistreatment.

Transsexual: An older term for transgender which is generally not used anymore and can be understood as offensive in some contexts. This could refer to a person who medically changes their body to match with their gender identity. This may be done through hormone treatments and/or surgical procedures.

Two-Spirit: An umbrella term that refers to the gender identities that have existed historically in many Native communities that are outside of a colonialist viewpoint of the gender binary. It is also an identity that many contemporary LGBTQ Native people are continuing and/or using to reclaim these roles within their communities.