



# Supporting Family Members of LGBTQ2S+ Young People

## Tip Sheets for Juvenile Justice Providers



Funding for this publication was provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice (15PJDP-22-GK-03104-TITL). Points of view or opinions expressed in this presentation are those of the contributor(s) and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of OJJDP or the U.S. Department of Justice.



**THE PRIDE JUSTICE RESOURCE CENTER**  
The National Resource Center on Justice-Involved LGBTQ2S+ Youth

# Supporting Family Members of LGBTQ2S+ Young People

## Tip Sheet for Juvenile Justice Providers

As professionals in the Juvenile Justice System, you may come in contact with family members who are in distress, or are describing family conflict, about their child's LGBTQ2S+ identity. It is important that you know how to support families through discussions about their experiences, their worries, and questions.

Research has shown that when families support and affirm their LGBTQ2S+ child, it reduces anxiety, depression, suicidal ideation, harmful substance use, and other negative life and health outcomes for the LGBTQ2S+ young person. It is imperative that juvenile justice system professionals provide non-judgmental spaces for families to seek support and a listening ear, while also offering them resources that will further their learning and understanding of how to affirm their LGBTQ2S+ child. Here are some helpful tips to keep in mind:



## **Build Rapport**

Try to build rapport. Often, family members are struggling to reconcile their love for their LGBTQ2S+ child with things they have learned through media, their faith community, or cultural teachings. Before discussing these deeply personal topics, it is important to build some rapport and trust.

## **Ask Questions**

Ask them what they know about LGBTQ2S+ people and where they learned the information from. Many people hear inaccurate stereotypes early in life from the media or broader community. Sometimes asking this question can lead to an acknowledgment that some information they hear can be inaccurate. They may even discuss how their early learning about LGBTQ2S+ identities have shaped their misconceptions about LGBTQ2S+ people.

## **Listen for Cues**

Listen for cues that they want more information. They may say something like, “I don’t even know what that is,” or, “I am not sure what I am supposed to do.” When you hear these cues, ask them if they are open to learning more and connect them to relevant resources.

## **Encourage Support**

Ask the family member what kind of life they would hope for their LGBTQ2S+ child. If they say things like “health” or “happiness,” you can connect those goals to what we know about the importance of family support for increased health and positive life outcomes. If they say something like, “I wanted them to graduate high school and get a good job,” you can use that as an opportunity to educate them on how

important family support is in building confidence and navigating environments like school or workplaces.

## Offer Support

Offer supports that align with their faith. If the family member is unsure of how to respond because of their faith, you can ask them if there are tenants of their faith that would allow them to continue to show love and kindness to their LGBTQ2S+ child. You can also share resources with them on LGBTQ2S+ affirming faith communities in their denomination that they can contact for further support.

## Show Love

Encourage family members to continue to show love and affection to their LGBTQ2S+ child, even if they are conflicted. The LGBTQ2S+ young person does not need to know they are conflicted. If families continue to show love to their child, it will result in better outcomes for them.

As you work with families on building their affirmation and support of their LGBTQ2S+ child, keep in mind that research has shown, that even small changes towards affirmation can make a big difference in health and wellbeing ([Ryan, 2010](#)), and even one supportive adult can drastically reduce the risk to suicide ([Trevor Project, 2019](#)). Working with families on this topic is an important step in efforts to reduce LGBTQ2S+ disparities in the juvenile justice system.



HERE ARE A FEW WAYS FAMILY CAN SHOW **LOVE**:

- Continue to show affection to their LGBTQ2S+ child
- Tell the young person they love them
- Include them in family activities and rituals
- Ask their LGBTQ2S+ child for time to learn more about the topic
- Avoid speaking negatively about the situation in front of the young person

## Helpful Resources

To find out more about how to support families of LGBTQ2S+ people, please visit: <https://pjrc.ncjfcj.org/videos/theres-no-place-like-home-working-with-familiesof-lgbtq2s-youth-in-systems/>

If families have concerns about their child's identity as it relates to the family's culture or faith, you should connect them to affirming faith and culturally specific groups to help address their needs. Here are a few great resources that can help:

- [Family Acceptance Project](#) has pamphlets, videos, posters, and publications that can help providers have conversations with families/caregivers around their challenges and on how to adopt accepting and affirming behaviors for the benefit of their adolescent. [gaychurch.org](#) keeps a database of affirming Christian churches that can be searched by zip code.
- [Trans Family Support Services](#) has a lot of support groups for LGBTQ+ youth and caregivers.
- [Freedhearts.org](#) has online discussion and support groups for religious families coming to terms with their child's gender identity and/or sexual orientation.
- [PFLAG](#) is a support network that has chapters across the country. The group stands for Parents and Families of Lesbians and Gays and is a group for parents ran by other parents who have gone through similar processes. No matter the stage a family/caregiver is in, PFLAG is a good resource to which to refer them. They also offer resources for families that practice [Judaism](#) as well as [Islam](#).

