

Two Ways for Parents to Support a Child Identifying as LGBT/SSA

Even when meaningful distinctions exist, it's common in current U.S. society for one particular view of important concepts or ideas to be presented as absolute and unquestioned. As a way to further open the public conversation on LGBT issues, the following parallel contrast in meanings are offered - based on narrative analysis of hundreds of accounts and feedback from a socio-politically diverse array of colleagues. Rather than insinuating only 'two paths' available, the aim is to clarify and juxtapose differences in the experience of supporting an LGBT/SSA-identifying child across progressive and conservative communities. While some may integrate different meanings in unique combinations (e.g., adopting the label of gay while largely following the right column), generally speaking these clusters of meaning are proposed as representing legitimate differences in how America's socio-politically diverse communities respond to LGBT/SSA issues.

Encouraging your child to "come out"

Supporting your child in learning different ways of thinking about "coming out"

Beginning to describe your child gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or queer

Beginning to describe your child as experiencing same-sex attraction – or taking on no label

Sharing this moment with others as a more complete reflection your child's core identity

Sharing this moment with others as an enlarged perspective of your child's experience

And certainly more than simply something he/she is experiencing

And not necessarily a reflection of his/her core identity

Starting to emphasize your child's sexual orientation over other aspects of self

Continuing to emphasize various aspects of self – alongside your child's sexual orientation

And beginning to see gay rights as a new centrally defining life cause

And continuing to see other things as centrally defining life causes

Fighting and pushing back against anyone that would question your new view of identity

Accepting that there are many different views of identity, and that's okay

Laying aside further attempts to help your child grow and develop in relation to sexuality

Continuing to seek further growth and development for your child in relation to sexuality

Accepting that his/her original life plan may need to be drastically revised

Accepting that his/her original life plan is still possible

And helping your child let go of those dreams

And helping your child hold on to those dreams

And begin to seek others

And continue to take steps towards them

Ultimately, beginning to re-think your family's values, philosophies or faith as something that may need to be left behind or significantly revised

Retaining your family's values, philosophy or faith as something most likely still worth preserving and trusting