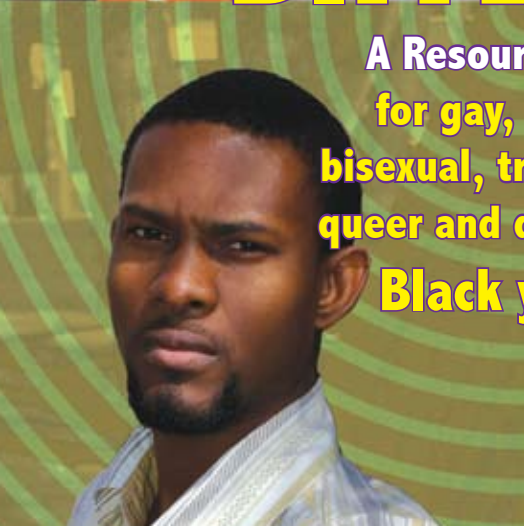




# DEALING WITH BEING DIFFERENT



A Resource Guide  
for gay, lesbian,  
bisexual, transgender,  
queer and questioning  
Black youth.



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**B L A C K**



**BLACK COALITION FOR AIDS PREVENTION**

**C • A • P**

The Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) is a non-profit, community based, AIDS Service organization in Toronto that works with African and Caribbean people who are either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Black CAP's mission is to reduce the spread of HIV infection within Black communities, and to enhance the quality of life of Black people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Black CAP accomplishes this mission through various programs and services offered by its Prevention, Education, Support, and Outreach departments.

With funding from the City of Toronto - Access and Equity Program and the Community One Foundation, Black CAP chose to develop this resource booklet to help Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) Black youth and their families with the "coming out" process. Black CAP also wants to support youth struggling with issues about sexuality, and who are feeling disconnected from the support of family. Black CAP recognizes that as a result of this isolation, homophobia and rejection, many LGBTQ youth are at greater risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

In the process of creating this booklet, Black CAP consulted with, and gathered support from, a number of individuals and organizations. Special thanks to Supporting Our Youth - and the Black Queer Youth Group (BQY), staff and students at the Triangle Alternative School Program, our partners in the project, the African Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), and finally our funders at the City of Toronto and the Community One Foundation.

**I**f you're reading this booklet you are probably a Black, African and Caribbean youth who is questioning your sexual orientation and exploring whether you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). We've developed this booklet because we recognize that the experiences of Black LGBTQ youth can be somewhat different and more complex than that of other LGBTQ youth. This booklet may also be for someone you know who is experiencing difficulties in speaking about these issues with family or friends. The information in this booklet gives some practical advice, and answers some of the questions you may be struggling with, as well as offer some answers for family and friends too.

## **Dealing with-** Figuring Out Who You Are and What to Call Yourself

Know that what you are feeling is normal for you, however you choose (or don't choose) to identify your sexual orientation.

**“Know that what you are feeling is normal”**

Sexual orientation is about who you want to have sex with and who you want to be in love with. It is a complex and challenging question that many young people struggle with. But remember that you don't have to be having sex to have a sexual orientation. It's also about who you're attracted to, and

who you love. Love and sex are normal and natural, no matter who you choose to share them with. It is often quite difficult for young people to deal with questions around sex and sexuality. It can be even more difficult for Black, Caribbean and African

youth, who may feel they must juggle both their sexuality and being Black. Despite all this, it is completely healthy to ask yourself questions about who you are, who you are sexually attracted to, and who you love.



## **Dealing with-** Sexual Orientation vs. Identity

Black youth who believe that they may be gay, lesbian or bisexual may also be feeling that those labels don't quite relate to the experience they are going through. Some young people feel that you can't be both Black and gay or lesbian, and that it's either or. Gay, lesbian, and bisexual might sound like very white, and middle class labels to you. In some instances the labels queer or questioning can better refer to people who choose to never identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual. Perhaps others may choose to avoid any labels at all. No matter how you do it, this decision is ultimately up to you.

## **Dealing with- Sexual Orientation vs. Gender Identity**

Some youth who are questioning their sexuality, might also be questioning their gender identity. While you can be gay, lesbian, and bisexual you can also be transgendered: they are two different things. Keep in mind that sexual orientation is about who you are sexually attracted to, and gender identity is about how you see yourself, or would like others to see you. For instance, some youth who are born male may feel more like females on the inside and feel more comfortable expressing themselves differently than most males are traditionally expected to. If you are unsure whether you are dealing with sexual orientation or gender identity issues, we suggest that you also check out 'Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Parents of Trans Youth' ([http://www.ctys.org/about\\_CTYS/FamiliesInTransition.htm](http://www.ctys.org/about_CTYS/FamiliesInTransition.htm)) by the Pride and Prejudice program at Central Toronto Youth Services or connect with the Trans Youth Toronto drop-in program offered at the 519 Church St. Community Center. There are a number of programs offered for both trans men (female to male) and trans women (male to female) in both of these spaces. Contact information for these organizations is available in the resource section at the end of this booklet. Coming out isn't solely about coming out as gay, lesbian, or bisexual and can also apply to coming out to family and friends about being transgendered/transexual.

## **Dealing with- Being Unsure**

Being unclear or unsure about oneself is perfectly okay too, especially for young people who are still uncertain about all the new sexual and romantic feelings they are experiencing. Coming to terms with who you are takes time, and is different for everyone. Most often, our minds and bodies eventually tell us loud and clear about who we are, and who we are attracted to. Listen to what your body is telling you, and trust that it's okay.

## **Dealing with- Feeling Abnormal**

Despite the negative things friends, family, or even society may tell you, being LGBTQ is normal and natural, and is as normal and natural as heterosexuality. You should know that LGBTQ people have been around as long as everyone else. Alice Walker, Alvin Ailey, Langston Hughes, James Baldwin and Audre Lorde are just a few examples of gays and lesbians who've

made history in the Black community. There are many more examples of LGBTQ persons who've lived, and are living full, loving, and productive lives. Being 'normal' is being honest with yourself about how you feel, being healthy and respecting yourself and others.

## **Dealing with- Wondering "Why?"**

In all honesty, no one is quite sure why some people are LGBTQ. Some people believe that you're born this way, while others believe it has to do with how you're raised. The truth is that it doesn't really matter why people are LGBTQ. Most straight people don't ask themselves, "Why am I straight?" they just live their lives. Some people in our Black communities associate homosexuality with "white" influences. This is completely false. LGBTQ people are in every community, and have been since before white people came into the picture. Instead of focusing on the 'why' try to focus on 'how' you can be honest with yourself, and live your life the best way you can.

## **Dealing with- Wanting to Change**

Some people believe that sexual orientation or identity can be changed through will-power or by counselling or therapy. It is now generally understood that this is not possible. Some people believe that repressing or avoiding their sexuality is also an option. Unfortunately this can do more harm than good. The healthiest method of resolving any negative feelings is to learn to accept yourself and who you are attracted to, which may take some time. Counselling and therapy may be good options for you if you need to talk or learn how to cope with how you feel, but make sure that whoever you speak with is LGBTQ positive and there to support you and not "fix" you. At times, parents may lead you into seeing



“professionals” in the hope of changing you. You have a choice in who you receive services from. Remember, when it isn't broke, there isn't anything to fix.

## **Dealing with- Family and Friends**

In some instances, parents and family already have an idea that their child is gay or lesbian even before they are able to say so themselves. This can sometimes be difficult for some parents to accept and so, they avoid, deny, or attempt to “fix” the “problem” in their children through guilt, threats, violence and/or religion. Other parents have no idea that their child is gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender and for these parents, hearing this from their kid or other people can be very challenging. They may also try to avoid, deny or “fix” their child's homosexuality. This can be very hard on young people (and adults!), and for many youth may be the source of low self-esteem and sadness. Grief and sadness are normal reactions to not having your feelings heard. But normal sadness can sometimes turn into depression if not dealt with or resolved. During this stage, it may be beneficial to speak with a trained counsellor whom you trust, and who can help you better strategize around dealing with your family and friends. The SAPACCY program through the Center for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH), employs trained therapists from the Black community who are able to assist Black LGBTQ youth through some of these challenges.

## **Understanding what “Coming Out” is all about**

*“Coming out is about feeling comfortable with yourself, being able to wake up in the morning and not worry about what you feel about yourself. To be able to not see any problem with who you are”*

Youth, 18

“Coming out” is about you coming to terms with being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. For some LGBTQ people, coming out is also about sharing this realization with family, friends and those closest to you. Some choose to only share this information with those they can trust - at first. Some choose to tell the world in more public ways. Some people choose never



to come out and keep this information completely private. Understand that coming out is a process, and it is a process that should be started if and when you are ready. It's up to you and only you. Think through your decision based on what you know of yourself, and of the people in your life. Remember that sometimes we expect family and friends not to understand, when sometimes they might. Find supportive friends, family, teachers, or LGBTQ support groups to confide in during this time. As Black, African and Caribbean people we are extremely resilient. Know that you are not alone and that there will be a time when this struggle will eventually pass.

## **Dealing with-** the Friction of Faith

For many Black, African and Caribbean people, faith is a large part of our identity and community. While faith and religion can be a unifying force, it can also be used to condemn and justify violence against individuals and groups of people. As a young person who is trying to figure out all of these issues, these negative messages about God not approving of who you are can make things seem even more confusing. Some LGBTQ people choose to turn away from their faith communities or religion because of these experiences. Others may throw themselves even further into their faith, in an attempt to be “healed” of their perceived “sin”. Both of these scenarios can have a traumatizing effect on individuals, as they are forced to leave behind a part of themselves in order to acknowledge another. There are a number of LGBTQ affirming congregations in the city that create inclusive spaces where LGBTQ people can reconcile their sexual and spiritual identities and get support. Check out the list of resources at the end of the booklet for more about these ministries.

## Dealing with- Coming Out

*"To me before I came out it was really hard because you have to try and walk a certain way, you have to be looking and thinking who's watching you."*

Youth, 19

Coming out is not about being different or changing who you are. You are the same person after coming out that you were before; the only real difference is that you are more open with those that are closest to you as well as yourself. Some LGBTQ youth think that there is a particular way to act now that they have told people in their lives that they are gay. Some young people feel inspired to become active in the LGBTQ community, which is usually about building support and being a part of a community of similar people. This is not necessarily the case for everyone, and it all comes down to choice for each individual. Coming out doesn't have to be about changing your friends, and who you choose to associate with because you are now open about being LGBTQ, although in some instances this may happen. Do what is comfortable for you. If you are ready to come out to family and friends come up with a plan and think through the ways in which you'd like to share this information. Perhaps you could tell others over the telephone, out in a public place like a restaurant, by email, or through a letter. Whichever way you choose to share is up to you, but make sure that you feel safe enough to take this step. Check out the Personal Safety and Support Inventory in this booklet to determine your readiness.

## Dealing with- Juggling Being Black and LGBTQ

The process of coming to terms with your sexuality can be a challenging and consuming issue. As Black LGBTQ people, this process can be compounded by the existing challenge of being a person of colour in a racialized and racist society. Many Black LGBTQ youth may feel that they must choose between their sexual identities and their racial or cultural ones, and because of this belief, experience a lot of confusion as they move between both identities. Cultural and faith communities may lead us to falsely believe that an LGBTQ identity, cultural or faith identity cannot co-exist. They can. Being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender cannot take away who you are, what you believe in, and where you come from. Sometimes the mainstream

LGBTQ community can also have us feeling as if we are not included because of race or culture. While this can be seen as another hurdle Black LGBTQ youth and communities must overcome, it can also be seen as an opportunity for us to create new spaces and identities for ourselves. There are a number of Black LGBTQ individuals and groups that work towards building these new spaces and ways of viewing community identity.

## **Dealing with- Stress and Making Healthier Choices**

*“After coming out, home wasn’t a good atmosphere for me anymore. Not only did I come out as being lesbian, I also began doing a lot bad things in my life like drugs or partying”*

Youth, 18

Coming out as LGBTQ to friends, family and even to yourself, can be a lot to deal with. It can seem even more difficult for Black, African and Caribbean youth who in addition to race, now must also deal with sexuality, often without the full support of family and community. Sometimes when you feel unsupported and alone, you can be led to make choices you might not normally make.

Sometimes using drugs and alcohol, or having unsafe sex may seem like the only way to connect to other people or forget about how bad you feel at this moment. Remember that drugs and/or alcohol and/or having unsafe sex may make you feel a lot worse about yourself and leave you at risk for health problems, sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/

**“Do what’s  
needed to keep  
safe, sober and  
healthy”**

AIDS. Remember that no matter how you are feeling about yourself and your situation at the moment, it can and will improve. Do what’s needed to keep safe, sober and healthy. Find friendships that support you to make healthy decisions, like using condoms and having safer sex and/or being drug free (or using safely) and stick with them. Being LGBTQ and

Black isn’t the end of the world, it just means the beginning of a new one. There are Black LGBTQ who are living full, healthy and successful lives despite all the obstacles, and there’s nothing stopping you from being one of them.

## Dealing with- Sex and relationships

Sex is an important thing in all of our lives, and sex and sexual relationships will become

**“Setting boundaries is an important thing to do”**

more important for you as you grow up. For some of you it might be the biggest thing on your mind. You'll begin to ask yourself things like

“What kind of people am I attracted to?”, “What does a relationship look like for me?”, and “Where can I meet someone for sex?”

These questions are important questions to ask and will help you set boundaries. Setting boundaries is an important thing to do before getting involved in romantic and sexual relationships. Boundaries let other people know what we like and dislike, and show people that we have limits. For some gay and lesbian youth, there may be a pressure to engage in sex before they are ready in order to “test this ‘gay’ thing out”. Whatever you do, take the time to think it through. Don't feel pressured into being sexual before you're ready. When you are ready for sex, prepare yourself to be safe and to feel safe. Make your limits clear, and enforce them if you are able. If you're not able to, get out of any relationship or sexual situation that leaves you feeling unsafe.

Remember the importance of safer sex. Get information on how to have safer LGBTQ sex through agencies such as Black CAP, Planned Parenthood, Hassle Free Clinic, and Sherbourne Health Center's Supporting Our Youth Program (SOY) Both young women and men need to remember to use protective barriers such as condoms for any penetrative sex (sex toys included) and dental dams for oral sex (vaginal or anal) to protect yourself from sexually transmitted infections and HIV/AIDS. There's a lot of mis-information you've likely learned from friends or family about sex with people of the same sex. For more accurate information: guys visit [www.getthelowdown.ca](http://www.getthelowdown.ca), girls check out [www.onenightyourchoice.com](http://www.onenightyourchoice.com) and trans guys can visit [queertransmen.org](http://queertransmen.org) for more in depth details on sex related questions.



## Dealing with- Reactions from Family

*“Black families are like “you can’t be black and gay” they think it’s like some different creature. So it’s really hard to come out being Black”*

Youth, 18

Each family reacts differently to learning that their child is gay or lesbian. Some parents are not that surprised, perhaps having known that their children were different from an early age. Many parents and families go through a period of grieving after finding out about their kid’s sexual orientation. Black families are no different, although the way that grief and disappointment are expressed may be. The following are some examples of things parents may say, stages they’ll go through, and ways in which you can address them. Keep in mind that these are just examples, and everyone’s situation is unique. For some, the process of acceptance may be straightforward, for others it may be more like a revolving door:

### “Say What?!”

Finding out that a child is gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans can be really surprising and even shocking for parents, especially if they didn’t suspect that you were different. They may feel confused and scared for your safety and well-being. Other parents may feel as if their dreams for your future (and maybe theirs), such as seeing you get married and having children, are now ruined.

### How to deal:

Know that your future is not ruined, those plans have just been changed. After telling your family, allow them to take in what you’ve told them. Time and space can be your best friends at this point; don’t be afraid to use them.

## “Not my Child!” or “Not in my House”

Some parents choose not to accept that their child is LGBTQ. They may say things like, “you’re confused” or “God wouldn’t give me a child like that!” Know that their denial is only an attempt to protect themselves from the weight of what they’ve just learned about you. Recognizing this, however, doesn’t mean that you have to go along with it. Just because your parents aren’t able to face the truth doesn’t mean you have to deny yourself.



### How to deal:

State your case clearly, explaining that this is simply a part of who you are. Let them know that when they are ready, you are open and willing to talk with them about it. Don’t feel pressured to lie along with them. In some instances though, you may decide that your families avoidance of your sexuality is better than the alternative, and so for the time being you choose to leave it as is. That’s okay too. There is a difference between their denial and your denial. Do what works for you and your family, and again, give it time.

## “How Dare You!” or “Get Out!”

Parents often feel extremely hurt after learning that a child is LGBTQ. These feelings can sometimes come out in the form of anger through words or sometimes, through physical violence. Recognize that this is about them and their feelings of hurt or fear, and that you do not deserve these words or actions. In other situations, parents may ask you to leave, or you may have to leave because of the hostility in the home.

### How to deal:

If you're able, ask your parents what their anger is about. It may not only be about you being LGBTQ - perhaps it is about their concern over what family and friends may/will think. If you feel that their anger is making you feel unsafe, let them know that. Perhaps you can share this booklet with them. If things are not improving, remove yourself from any situation you feel places you in emotional or physical harm. Try to get

someone else involved; someone that you feel would be supportive. Perhaps a close aunt or uncle who may take you in until things cool down at home. Connect with staff at some of the agencies listed in the resources section of this booklet such as Central Toronto Youth Services or Supporting Our Youth (SOY). Staff at supportive agencies may be able to help you plan what actions to take next. Your safety is always what's most important.

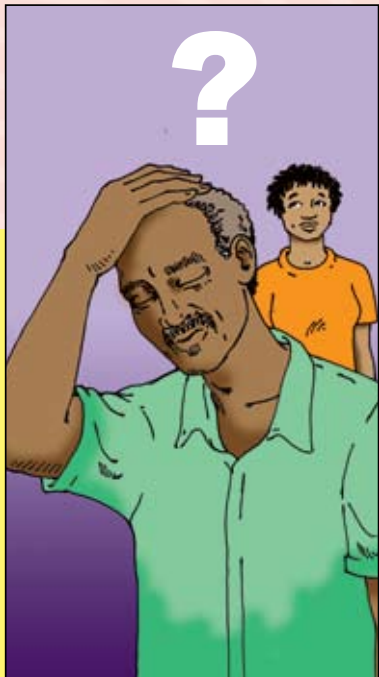


## “Where Did I Go Wrong?”

Many times, parents or other family members may feel ashamed or guilty because their child is LGBTQ. They may place blame on you, on others or on themselves. There is no one to blame in this situation, and it’s not your place to take those things on. You are who you are, and you’ve chosen to share this part of yourself with them because they mean so much to you.

### How to deal:

Let them know how much they mean to you, and that this is why you’ve chosen to tell them about this part of yourself. Explain that there is nothing for you or them to feel guilty about. Do things that help to build your sense of esteem. Visit with friends who you feel supported by, or join groups like Supporting Our Youth’s Black Queer Youth group (BQY). Being in environments that acknowledge who you are can really help you to handle some of the negativity at home. Again, give your family the space needed to adjust to the news, and the space you need to build up your own confidence in who you are.





## “I’m good, but let’s keep this between us.”

In many situations, one or both parents may already have suspected that a child is LGBTQ. They may generally be okay about what you’ve shared with them...with one catch, you need to keep it in the family. For many Black homes with strong ties to extended families and communities, a child coming out in the home can translate into a larger coming out process that involves the entire community. Involving the community might mean dealing with homophobia from extended family members, neighbours, or members of the church or mosque. Your family’s fear of being stigmatized can, in turn, cause you to feel silenced or pushed back into the closet you’ve just come out of.



### How to deal:

For some youth, there may be a desire to be open about their sexuality outside of the home. On the other hand, some youth may be okay with not disclosing being LGBTQ to outside family or friends. It's important to remember that you should do what feels right for you. While it's expected that you give due respect to your parents, your parents must also be able to respect you and your need to be yourself regardless of outside criticism. Let them know what your thoughts are around this, and negotiate how you will go about this as a family.

## Dealing with- Violence and Homophobia/Transphobia

*"I think that Black gays get a lot of bashing from Black straight guys. If for example, two gay guys are walking, one is Black and the other white and there is a group of Black straight guys, the gay Black one is usually the only one getting bashed."*

Youth, 20

**“Homophobic violence and abuse of any kind is not okay”**

While being open and out about your sexuality can seem like the right thing to do once you've come to terms with being LGBTQ, things like emotional and physical safety have to be considered. Depending on the level of homophobia in your home, school, neighbourhood or peer group sometimes it is better to be strategic in when, how, where and with whom you choose to disclose your sexual orientation. Not all LGBTQ people will have the opportunity to choose, and are "outed"

by family or peers. Some may already be experiencing violence because others feel they are gay or lesbian.

Homophobic violence and abuse of any kind is not okay, and if you are feeling unsafe in any environment, it is important to discuss this with someone that you can trust. If you are being bullied at school, think about informing your teachers or the office about it. The Toronto Police and the LGBT Police Consultative Committee have launched a campaign called RHVP or Report Homophobic Violence, Period. This campaign encourages young people to report to authorities experiences of violence of harassment in school. Visit [www.torontopolice.on.ca/rhvp/](http://www.torontopolice.on.ca/rhvp/) for more information on how to report homophobic bullying, or contact the 519 Community Center's Anti-Violence Program. Unfortunately when the bullying and violence is happening at home, knowing who to talk to can be hard. Talk to someone you trust. As African and Caribbean people, violence by family can be seen as being about discipline (and about love). Remember to keep yourself safe, and remember that violence by family or friends is about their own misdirected fears. It's not your fault. Check out the list of resources at the end of this booklet for other places you can call or go to get support and assistance if you are experiencing violence related to being gay or lesbian.

## Coming Out - A Personal Safety and Support Inventory

Am I ready to deal with potentially negative reactions from friends, family, classmates, etc.?

Yes  No

What are the possible reactions I'll receive?

Do I have emotional support(s) from others in place if I do receive negative reactions from people in my life? Yes  No

If yes, Who are my support(s)?

If I have to leave home is there a place I can go that is safe? Yes  No

Where can I go?

Do I have money to support myself if I have to leave home? Yes  No

Am I concerned about my physical safety? Yes  No

If yes, is this threat an immediate one? Yes  No

Do I know where I can go to get support if I am experiencing physical abuse from friends or family? Yes  No

Where can I go for support from physical abuse?

## **Dealing with- Myths about LGBTQ people**

*“When people hear the term gay, they think it’s all about sex, drugs, and suicide. Gay people also have lives though too. We are normal people, we work, we have families, we have lives.”*

Youth, 18

Many families and LGBTQ youth, are constantly exposed to false and negative stories about gay and lesbian people. Most of these stories are myths people have created about LGBTQ people, and unfortunately people believe these myths. These negative ideas can affect the way families and friends view the LGBTQ people in their lives, and sometimes even the way LGBTQ youth see themselves. These beliefs can be extremely stigmatizing, and are often a starting ground for a lot of homophobia (irrational fear) and misunderstanding.

The following are a few examples of some myths that exist about gay and lesbian people in Black communities, and a more appropriate response to them.

### **Being LGBTQ is a “white” problem.**

LGBTQ people are not a “problem” they are people who happen to love others of the same sex or have a different gender or sexual identity. There are LGBTQ people in every community, culture and ethnic group. Being lesbian, gay, homosexual, bisexual, transgendered or queer is not a “white” thing or a Black thing, it simply is.

### **Homosexuality is ruining the Black community**

The Black community is not one community but a vibrant collection of many communities of people from different parts of the world, with strong histories, speaking different languages, with unique cultures. LGBTQ people are part of all of these communities. Our collective communities have many issues to address such as systemic racism, poverty, unemployment, gang violence and the impact of collective trauma as a result of a shared history of slavery. LGBTQ people are not the cause these challenges faced by our communities.

## **Gay men all have HIV/AIDS**

Some, not all, gay men have or will acquire HIV/AIDS. Many African and Caribbean heterosexual people have or will acquire HIV/AIDS also. However, HIV/AIDS is not a “gay disease” - it is primarily a sexually transmitted one. In fact, HIV/AIDS is as big a problem in Black, African and Caribbean communities among straight women and men. Unprotected sex is number one cause of the spread of HIV/AIDS in communities across the world, not gay men. HIV/AIDS is not an inevitable outcome for men who have sex with men (MSM). Because of myths like this, some gay Black men walk around with the thought, “I’m going to get AIDS no matter what I do so what’s the point of safer sex?” The majority of gay men do not have HIV/AIDS, and for those that do, medical treatments are helping them to live longer, healthier lives. The other sad fact of this myth is that straight people in our communities are unaware of their own risk of getting HIV/AIDS and not always protecting their health.

## **All Black Gay men are on the Down Low**

Men on the Down Low (DL), or men who identify as straight while still having sex with other men, are present in every community, including the Black community. The media has chosen to exaggerate the incidence of this in the Black community, overshadowing the fact that there are large numbers of Black, African and Caribbean men who openly identify as gay or bisexual. These men lead full lives, hold down jobs, and contribute to their communities, and are not ashamed of who they are, and who they love. The stigma and violence towards gay men in Black communities may in part explain the number of men who have chosen to remain closed about their sexual orientation. As community attitudes become more open, it’s more than likely so will men living on the DL.



## **There are no Healthy LGBTQ Relationships**

Some people incorrectly assume that gay, lesbian and bisexual people are not capable of acquiring or maintaining long-lasting, healthy relationships. This is not the case. LGBTQ people are as capable of creating great friendships and romantic relationships as heterosexual people. Thanks to changes in our government's attitude towards LGBTQ people, many gay, lesbian and transgender couples are married, are able to adopt, raise birth children of their own, and/or are part of larger "chosen" families. Chosen families are large networks of birth family, friends, and allies who come together to create a supportive



community in the lives of LGBTQ people. These communities give many gay and lesbian people the loving support that families should, but are not always able to provide.

## **Lesbian women just need to meet the "right man"**

People often believe that women who identify as lesbian are simply confused about their sexuality, have experienced sexual abuse, and/or just need to meet the "right" man. This is not the case. In fact, this kind of thinking has led to a lot of sexual violence against women in our community. Believing that you can "cure" homosexuality through finding the "right" man (or woman in the case of gay men) and then simply having sex with him is false and a wasted effort.

## **Sexual Abuse during childhood makes people LGBTQ**

While it's true that some LGBTQ people have experienced sexual violence in their childhood, there is no relationship between this and sexual orientation. Childhood sexual abuse is unfortunately fairly common in every community, although historically there's not been as much discussion around this issue in Black communities. Sexual violence is not a determinant of whether or not someone will later identify as being gay or lesbian, but it may determine whether or not someone is able to feel a personal sense of control and safety within the relationships they choose to have.



## GLOSSARY

We've used a lot of terms in this book that may be new to you. Here are some definitions:

**Straight:** Someone with sexual and/or romantic feelings for people of the opposite sex. These feelings usually begin during adolescence at the beginning of puberty.

**Gay:** Being sexually attracted to, and perhaps having romantic feelings for other men. These feelings usually begin during adolescence and the beginning of puberty, but for some people they may emerge later in your adult life.

**Lesbian:** Being sexually attracted to, and perhaps having romantic feeling towards other women. These feelings usually begin during adolescence and the beginning of puberty, but for some people they may emerge later in your adult life.

**Bisexual:** Having a sexual and/or romantic attraction to members of the same sex as well as towards the opposite sex. They may prefer one gender over the other, but are able to be in intimate relationships with both.

**Queer:** This is a term often used by straight people as an offensive slur, but that's been reclaimed by gay, lesbian, and trans people, and is sometimes used to describe sexuality that is different from heterosexual norms.

**\*Transgender:** Having a gender identity (how we view ourselves) or expression (how we choose to show ourselves to the world) different from conventional male or female expectations. An example would be someone who is born a physical female, but who feels more identified with being a male on the inside, and chooses to express that through behaviour or dress.

**\*Transsexual:** Similar to transgender people, gender identity and expression may be different from conventional male or female expectations. Unlike transgendered people, transsexuals who feel this contrast in themselves may take steps to match how they feel on the inside with their external body through medical or surgical means. Not all transsexuals undergo changes to their sex organs, but may alter their physiology through hormone therapy or chest surgeries. Transsexual people are not automatically gay - they may be gay, straight or bisexual.

*\*These labels are not about sexual orientation, but rather about identity and expression.*

**LGBTQ:** This is a short-form for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Questioning. This abbreviation is often used as a quick and easy acronym to describe these communities as a whole.

**Sexual Orientation:** This is how you feel about other people sexually and romantically on the inside. Sexual orientation (or preference) is about who you desire to be with intimately or form intimate relationships with. Sexual orientation is different from behaviour, in that you cannot choose who you are attracted to (orientation), but you do choose whether or not you act on those attractions (behaviour).

**Sexual Behaviour:** This is how you behave or act sexually. Your sexual behaviour may or may not be the same as your sexual orientation. An example would be a man or woman who identifies themselves as gay or lesbian, but continues to have sex with the opposite sex.

**Sexual Identity:** This is how you choose to label or think about yourself. Words like “gay” and “straight” tell us something about a person’s identity and sexual orientation. But a person’s identity may or may not be quite the same as his sexual behaviour. An example would be someone who identifies as heterosexual or straight, but has sex with the same sex.

**Coming out:** This is the process of becoming comfortable about your own sexual orientation, and then choosing how to go about sharing that information with others (family, friends, classmates). This is a unique process that looks very different for each individual. In some cases, “coming out” is seen as unnecessary for some gay and lesbian people.

**Homophobia:** This is about a person or group’s irrational fear, hatred, or intolerance towards people who are gay, lesbian or bisexual, or towards those who are believed to be. These strong feelings of fear often lead to homophobic behaviour such as name-calling, ostracizing of, or in many instances violence towards lesbian, bisexual or gay people.

**Transphobia:** This is about a person or group’s aversion or fear of people who identify, or present as transsexual or whose external gender expression differs from traditional gender role norms. Like homophobia, transphobia can often lead individuals with these feelings of fear or contempt to act out in violent and abusive ways towards trans-people through words and in many cases through actions.

**MSM:** This term is a short-form for 'men who have sex with men' (MSM). It is a word that was created by social scientists to describe all men who have sex with men whether gay, bisexual, transgender/sexual or heterosexually identified.

**Down Low:** This is a term often used to describe men who have sex with men who may not identify as gay or bisexual, have primary relationships with women, and who choose to keep their sexual behaviour with other men hidden from family, friends, and their female partners.

## **Who, What, Where! - Toronto Area Resources**

Black CAP has a number of youth-specific information, resources and programming offered through its Prevention Department. For young women, [www.onenightyourchoice.com](http://www.onenightyourchoice.com) offers a range of women's health and sexuality information. For young men who have sex with other men, [www.getthelowdown.ca](http://www.getthelowdown.ca) is available as a sexual health resource for gay, bisexual, and other men. Contact Black CAP directly for more information on other related programs and services at (416) 977-9955

Black CAP currently has a men's outreach and education program called Men 2 Gether. Condom outreach and peer education for Black men who have sex with men. The Men2Gether Project also refers a large number of clients for HIV and STI testing available at Hassle Free Clinic and other sexual health clinics in Toronto. Most recently as part of Men 2 Gether programming and in collaboration with the Hassle Free Clinic, Black CAP has launched a testing initiative for Black men in Toronto called No Name No Wait. All tests are provided by a testing counsellor, results take 10 minutes or under, and all client information is kept anonymous. For more information on the Men 2 Gether program, to arrange HIV testing, or simply to volunteer, contact [m2gether@black-cap.com](mailto:m2gether@black-cap.com) or call Black CAP at 416 977-9955

## **Counselling and Support Programs**

**Supporting Our Youth (SOY) - Black Queer Youth (BQY) - [www.soytoronto.org](http://www.soytoronto.org)**

333 Sherbourne Street, Tel: (416) 324-5077

SOY is a youth-focused program offered through SHC. Activities include a number of initiatives that aim to develop and link LGBTTIQ youth networks and build capacity through various employment, housing, social and art s projects. SOY also of houses a weekly social drop-in for Black LGBTTIQ youth under 29 years old called Black Queer Youth group (BQY). Under the supervision of a facilitator, the youth come together in this space to socialize, create art, discuss issues, and attend community outings. Check out the SOY website for more details on this group.

**Substance Abuse Program for African Canadian, and Caribbean Youth (SAPACCY)**  
[www.camh.net](http://www.camh.net)

33 Russell Street, Tel: (416) 535-8501

SAPACCY is a Center for Addictions and Mental Health (CAMH) program providing a range of culturally appropriate harm reduction treatments, early intervention and prevention services for African and Caribbean identified youth up to 24 years old. Program staff use an approach that involves meeting clients on their terms at a location of their choice. SAPACCY is a program inclusive of LGBTQ youth, and includes a part-time clinical staff whose focus is on working with LGBTQ youth dealing with addictions and mental health concerns.

**Griffin Center - [www.griffin-centre.org](http://www.griffin-centre.org)**  
24 Silverview Drive, Tel: (416) 222-1153

The Griffin Centre is a youth mental health agency with a range of programming from family counselling, HIV prevention education, and LGBTTIQ support. As part of this programming is Not Pink, a drop-in group for gay, bi and queer men/ transmen of colour under 30. As well Griffin offers ReachOUT, a youth worker facilitated drop-in support and social group is for LGBTQ youth of all abilities, and Compass, a group for youth with mild developmental delays

**Family Services Association - [www.fsatoronto.com](http://www.fsatoronto.com)**  
335 Church Street, Tel: (416) 595-9230

Family Service Association of Toronto (FSA) assists individuals and families dealing with a wide variety of life challenges. Family Service Association offers counselling, community development, advocacy and public education programs, and is available to all persons living and working in Toronto.

**David Kelley Services - Family Services Association- [www.fsatoronto.com](http://www.fsatoronto.com)**

As part of Family Services Association, the David Kelley Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (LGBTQ) Counselling Program provides professional, short-term, individual, couple and family counselling to people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or queer. This service assists individuals facing a broad range of issues such as coming out, sexual orientation and gender identity, isolation, discrimination, relationship issues, parenting, **gender reassignment transitioning, self-esteem and partner violence.**

### **519 Church Community Center - [www.the519.org](http://www.the519.org)**

**519 Church Street, Tel: (416) 392-6874**

The 519 Church Street Community Center is an innovative community center serving diverse communities in downtown Toronto. As a community center the 519 offers a range of programs and initiatives from support groups, home-less drop-ins, parenting programs, a clothing bank, and short-term counselling services. Given it's location in the heart of the Gay and Lesbian village neighbourhood, the 519 is an active and affirming LGBTQ positive community center

### **519 Anti-Violence Program**

**519 Church Street, Tel: (416) 392-6878 x337**

As part of 519's LGBTQ programs, the 519 Community Center houses the Anti-violence program and Bashing report line which assists LGBTQ individuals experiencing partner or homophobic violence through connecting individuals with police and facilitating any necessary reporting, court support, and counselling. See 519's website for more details.

### **Central Toronto Youth Services - [www.ctys.org](http://www.ctys.org)**

**65 Wellesley Street. East, Tel: (416) 924- 2100**

Central Toronto Youth Services (CTYS) is a community-based, accredited Children's Mental Health Centre with locations on Wellesley Street, Adelaide Street and in York Region serving youth at risk.

### **Pride and Prejudice - Central Toronto Youth Services**

This particular CTYS service offers unique programming for lesbian, gay, bisexual, intersex, transgender, transsexual and questioning youth 25 and under which may include individual counseling or group work,. Programs are available for youth who may be exploring issues related to gender identity and/or sexual orientation, community, prejudice, friendships, family and/or may need support during a life transition. Pride and Prejudice serves youth who are struggling with depression or anxiety, or confronting traumatic experiences, including childhood abuse and family violence. Most recently, CTYS launched a resource booklet entitled Families in TRANSition: A Resource Guide for Parents of Trans Youth.

### **PFLAG Canada - Toronto Chapter**

[www.pflagcanada.ca/chapters/Toronto/html/home.htm](http://www.pflagcanada.ca/chapters/Toronto/html/home.htm)

Tel: (Support-line) (416) 406-6378

PFLAG Canada is a national charitable organization, founded by parents who wished to help themselves and their family members understand and accept their non-heterosexual children during the often difficult coming out process. PFLAG is a nationally recognized presence with a highly effective network of people and resources focused on supporting and educating Canadians on issues of sexual orientation and gender identity. PFLAG local chapters also provide peer support groups for parents and families of gay and lesbian children. Check out the website for more information on Toronto's chapter, or a chapter in your area

### **LGBT Youth Line - [www.youthline.ca](http://www.youthline.ca)**

Tel: 1 800-268-9688 (YOUTH)

The Lesbian Gay Bi Trans Youth Line is a toll-free Ontario-wide peer-support counselling phone line for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, 2-spirited, queer and questioning young people. The Youth Line also provides online peer-support through the online forums, email response, and most recently instant messenger peer assistance.

### **Triangle Program - Oasis Alternative TDSB Secondary School - [http:// schools.tdsb.on.ca/triangle/program.html](http://schools.tdsb.on.ca/triangle/program.html)**

The Triangle Program is one of three classrooms that make up Oasis Alternative Secondary School. This full-time academic program offers LGBTTIQ students the structure and support needed to work alongside other gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students and those affected by homophobia.

## **Affirming Faith Organizations**

### **Verity Center for Better Living - [www.veritycentre.org](http://www.veritycentre.org)**

28 Milford Avenue, Tel: (416) 240-1956

Verity Centre is a Bible based, progressive and inclusive Christian teaching ministry located in Toronto. Verity Centre is a member of the Universal Foundation for Better Living a New Thought Ministry founded by The Rev. Dr. Johnnie Coleman in Chicago in 1974 in the tradition of the Unity School of Christianity. Verity Centre is lead by Reverend Evan Reid, and spiritual lessons surrounding the ministries 5 basic Truth Principles are offered through classes, seminars and Sunday sermon.

**Salaam - Queer Muslim Community of Toronto- [www.salaamcanada.org](http://www.salaamcanada.org)**

Salaam Toronto is part of the network Salaam Canada: Queer Muslim Communities. Salaam is a Muslim identified organization dedicated to social justice peace and human dignity by working to bring everyone closer to a world that is free from injustice, including prejudice discrimination, racism, misogyny, sexism and homophobia

**Metropolitan Community Church - [www.mcctoronto.com](http://www.mcctoronto.com)**

**115 Simpson Avenue, Tel: (416) 406-6228**

MCC Toronto is a progressive and inclusive Christian ministry whose mission it is to be a house of worship for all people. MCC Toronto is a member of Universal Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches, and is led by Reverend Brent Hawkes, a member of the Order of Canada. MCC Toronto has been actively involved in the LGBTQ community since the 1970's and was the first church to conduct a same-sex marriage in Canada. MCC Toronto houses both the Triangle Alternative High school program for LGBTQ youth and the Toronto chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG). Spiritual lessons are offered at MCC through classes, seminars, and Sunday sermon.



## Getting Through and Over

*"Acceptance is accepting the person fully, and tolerance is like people being polite, but not really acknowledging the fact that I'm gay and that I'm different. So tolerance is kind of like racism. White people may tolerate Black people, but they might not necessarily accept them."*

Youth, 17

The best case scenario for all involved would be if you could accept your gay or lesbian child without incident, unconditionally and with open arms. Unfortunately, it isn't the way that most parents follow. For some African and Caribbean families, acceptance is not an option due to cultural or religious reasons. In these cases we ask that parents instead focus on support and tolerance in place of acceptance. Your child doesn't need you to love and fully accept this part of who they are, but your child does need to know that in spite of your feelings about their sexuality, they remain loved by you. No matter what your cultural background or religious beliefs, the unconditional love of family is important. If you are not in a place to fully accept your child's sexuality, just love your child, and let time do the work. During this time look to outside support and gather strength through your family, friends, church or a counsellor. Make sure that these groups or individuals are willing to properly assist you at this moment, and will not add to any destructive or damning feelings. See the list of resources in this manual for organizations that can be of help such as Parent's and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG), and Family Services Association.



## Speaking to Your Children about Making Healthy Choices

*“What scares a lot of parents is that they don’t want their kids getting involved in all the drugs and things. They don’t think that they are ready to go out and have relations.”*

Youth, 19

Being Black and gay or lesbian can be difficult for some young people. Not having the proper emotional support from family and friends can make the adjustment even harder. Young gay and lesbian people are at greater risk of mental and emotional issues as a result of this lack of support, and these feelings can lead them to make choices around drugs, alcohol, and sex before they’re ready. As a parent, you can support your child to make healthier choices, by allowing honest, open and non-judgmental conversations with them. Creating a safe space for your children to speak with you about their concerns can go a long way in avoiding risky choices. Also remember that this is an extremely challenging time for your child, and that depression is very common among Black lesbian and gay youth. In fact, all gay and lesbian youth are more prone to thoughts of suicide. Be aware of how your child is coping with these changes during this time, and support them accordingly.

Your gay or lesbian child is not destined for a life of dysfunction, disorder and disease however. Gay and lesbian youth who feel loved, supported and listened to are just as capable of being successful adults. Unsafe sex and substance use are not inevitable for gay and lesbian people, and just as with straight youth, learning how to deal with the stresses of growing up can lead to making some unhealthy choices. Talk to your child about practicing safe sex. If you feel uncomfortable with these topics, direct your son or daughter to agencies that can. Young Black men who have sex with men need to be aware of STIs and HIV/AIDS, and how to protect themselves. Lesbians are not exempt from sexually transmitted infections either, and while your daughter may not necessarily need a birth control talk anymore, she’ll still need to know that safer sex is important for her as well. For information and support, connect your child to LGBTQ support groups, or agencies able to support young gay and lesbian youth of colour dealing with sexual or mental health issues. Details on various services in the city are provided in the resource section of this booklet.

out with drugs, alcohol and sex because they are not receiving the proper support from those closest to them. Assist your child during this time with love and support. Abusing or neglecting your child because they are gay or lesbian will only make problems worse. Your child's success or failure during this time is very dependant on the kind of loving environment you choose to create. Counselling programs for LGBTQ Black youth and families such as the ones offered by the SAPACCY program through the Center for Addictions and Mental Health may be one resource you can utilize during this period. See the list of resources in this booklet for SAPACCY contact information.

## Dealing with- the Unhappy Spouse

Different parents handle the news that their child is LGBTQ differently. In situations where both parents are involved, the difference in the way this information is accepted can be extreme. If you find yourself to be the more clear-headed parent, speak one-on-one with your partner or ex-partner. Try to make them

**“it's important that you be your child's ally and advocate**

understand that acting out with aggression, be it verbal or physical, will not make the situation better for them, and will only alienate your child. Whether or not you have accepted what your child has told you, it's important that you be your child's ally and advocate in these instances. Where your child's other parent is not in a place to listen openly, take their place and lend an ear. If your child feels ganged up on they may not feel safe and heard.



## Violence, Harassment and your Child

*"Either you're hated upon because you're a freak, you're stupid, you're an idiot, faggot or batty bwoy. You're not in the circle in the mainstream school. You're isolated from the crowd and looked down upon. It's real sad."*  
Youth, 16



Violence and homophobia will be something your child will likely experience at some point as a result of being gay or lesbian. Homophobia is an irrational fear, hatred, or intolerance towards people who are LGBTQ. Bullying in school because of homophobia or transphobia is a common problem. Being Black and gay or lesbian may increase the likelihood that they'll encounter these problems because they will be dealing with harassment and discrimination based on both race and sexuality. Whether or not you have come to terms with their sexuality, it is your role to ensure that you create a safe place for your child within your home and at school.

**"Your child's sexuality is not a choice, but whether or not you choose to hurt them is"**

For some youth, home is the last place they feel safe. Some parents' confusion, anger and fear leads them to behave in ways that are harmful to their child. Verbal and physical abuse is common. No matter how much you feel that yelling, name-calling or beatings are warranted in order to "correct" your child, none of these things are okay. Your child's sexuality is not a choice, but whether or not you choose to hurt them is. Some parents may be concerned about negative behaviours their child may be choosing to engage in at this time, and associate it with being LGBTQ. Some young people choose to act

## **“I’m good, but let’s keep this between us.”**

In many situations, as parents, you may have already suspected a child is LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay ,Bisexual,Trans, Queer). Overall, you may feel okay about what you’ve learnt except your nagging concern over what outside family, friends, or members of your faith community may say. For many Black homes with strong ties to extended families and communities, a child coming out in the home can translate into a larger coming out process that involves the entire community. Involving the community might mean dealing with homophobia from extended family members, neighbours, or members of the church or mosque. Your fear of being stigmatized can in turn, cause you to silence or shame your child, which may leave them feeling unsupported by you



### **How to deal:**

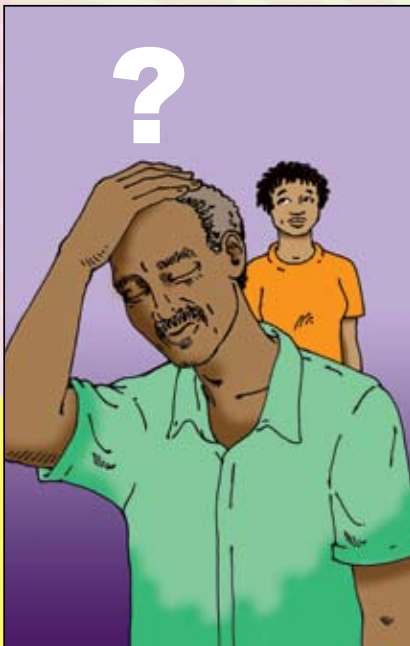
Recognize that this is about your child and not about you. While it may very well affect you and your family it's important that you place your child first. While it's expected that your children take into account the family unit, you must also be able to take their feelings into account as well. Supporting your child in secret, and shaming them through silence in public sends your child inconsistent messages about your love for them. Learning to address this situation openly and honestly within the family, can build the necessary tools to deal with addressing this at some point, outside the home as well.

## “Where did I go wrong?”

After hearing that your child is gay or lesbian, you may go looking for answers as to why your child is different. Questions often lead to more questions, and after finding few answers, many parents turn the blame on themselves. This blaming can turn into guilt, and guilt is rooted in shame. Although, these feelings of guilt and shame can be natural for a parent who is adjusting to the news, recognize that there is nothing to feel guilty about and that you did nothing wrong.

### How to deal:

Your child’s sexuality has nothing to do with what you’ve done or haven’t done. Friends, family and sometimes our own faith communities can reinforce this negative idea. Don’t allow yourself to be convinced. It is what it is. Parents of all races, from all backgrounds, religions, family types and income levels have, and will, go through similar experiences of learning that a child is gay or lesbian. You are not alone. Remember again, this isn’t your fault. Save yourself the stress, shame, and guilt. Instead of worrying about what you did wrong, try to remember that this is a moment where you can choose to do what’s right.



## “How dare you!” or “Get out!”

Anger is a normal but deceiving emotion, in that it often is a cover for other things like hurt and fear. Before lashing out (physically or emotionally) at your child, try and discover the source of your anger. Ask yourself why you feel the way you do. Are you angry that they hadn't told you sooner? Are you afraid of what the rest of the family will say? In many instances, the anger we direct at our children is about our own anger at ourselves.

### How to deal:

Be honest with, and own your emotions, remembering to ask yourself, “How will my anger change this situation?” Some parents feel that by using anger, they can scare their child straight. While your anger may in fact scare your child, it will do little to alter the truth they've chosen to share with you, but instead, only damage your relationship with them. Fear is not respect. Step back and assess yourself and the situation, and choose to not resort to violence, or making rash decisions like asking them to leave.



The following are some different emotional reactions parents may have upon learning this news. It's important to remember that it will take time to get used to this new reality and that you may move between each level in the grieving process many times before you are able to accept what you've learned. Also recognize that Black, African, and Caribbean families go about this process in unique ways, and that the acceptance process for you may appear different than your counterparts from other ethno-cultural communities. In the end though, it all comes down to loss, and your ability to understand and reconcile your grief without making this process an unsafe time between you and your child.

### **“Say what ?!”**

Coming to terms with information like this can be quite surprising, especially if you feel you know your child better than anyone. A child coming out about their sexuality might force parents to reconsider some of the things they felt they knew about their child, themselves and the family they've created. Fortunately taking stock, can often lead parents to a more positive and honest relationship with their children.

### **How to deal:**

Step back and take the time needed to absorb what you've learned. Try to come back to the situation with a clearer head, and be ready to have a healthy and supportive conversation with your child. Reacting too quickly in this stage can sometimes lead to decisions and action you will regret later. When in doubt, do nothing.





## **“Not my child.” Or “Not in my house”**

Some parents choose to not accept what their child has told them, saying things like “you’re just confused.” Or, “God wouldn’t give me a gay or lesbian child.” Realize that avoiding or denying something does not make it go away. If anything, behaving in this way will only create more distance and resentment where there needn’t be.

### **How to deal:**

If you don’t feel ready to accept what’s you’ve heard, let your child know that you’re not ready to deal with it at this time, although try and avoid shutting them down. The fact that they have come to you about this says a great deal about your relationship, and how much they value you being a part of their lives. You may not understand your children and the choices they make, but remember that listening and acceptance are essential parts of being a good parent.

Some parents may have heard from other sources (family, friends, school teachers) that their children may be gay or lesbian. Hearing this information from other people can be upsetting and the natural reaction may be denial.

### **How to deal:**

Recognize that at this point you don’t know anything for certain. In these situations, you have two options: 1. Wait for your child to choose to come to you about this 2. Ask your child if there is anything they’d like to share with you. In either situation the same rules apply. Create a safe place for your child to be able to come to you, listen attentively and try to be supportive. Again, denial will never make the situation go away.

## Dealing with- Feelings of Who to Blame and How to Explain

There is no conclusive scientific evidence that explains why some people are LGBTQ. Whatever the cause, be it genetic, environmental, or both there really isn't anyone to blame. Many parents fear being shamed by family, friends, co-workers or their congregation for being the reason that their child is different. This fear of criticism often inspires a parent's pursuit of these answers. Some get hung up on how often they took their child to Sunday service, or whether or not letting them play with dolls over toy trucks influenced their child's sexuality. Some parents wonder if sexual abuse was the cause, or whether exposing their child to too much "white" culture was the reason. None of these things will serve the best interests of your child and family. Despite the desire to seek out a cause to explain your child's preference, try to focus more on the what now? And less on the why?

## The Difficulty in Trying to Deal

*"Moms will sometimes say 'You need to go to church and God will forgive you. You won't be gay if you go to church and pray to God'. I feel, God made you for who you are, and what you're supposed to do in life, and God made me gay. That's how I'm supposed to be."*  
Youth, 19

There is no right way to feel when a child tells you they are gay or lesbian, and every parent experiences different emotions when they learn this news. Most parents experience emotions similar to those usually associated with grief. For some parents, a child coming out about their sexuality may feel exactly like a death. Your grief process is your own and valid. However, how you choose to behave based on these feelings must be carefully thought through. The most important thing is to keep the best interest of your child in mind at all times. Some parents of gay or lesbian children choose to end their relationship with their children, kick them out of the house, or become intent on "changing" them. Remember, the success, health and wholeness of your child is often very dependant on how you choose to support and love them when they come out to you. Disowning or attempting to "correct" your child will do nothing to gain the results you intend, except to create further strife in your home and family and place them at greater risk.

## **Dealing with-** the “Sex” in Your Child’s Sexuality

Parents often immediately think of sex when a child has told them about their sexual orientation. Just because your child has told you about their sexual orientation or identity does not necessarily mean that they are having sex. People do not have to be sexual to be aware of who they are sexually and romantically attracted to. Having your child tell you they are gay or lesbian can be difficult, but recognize this is mainly about how they feel, and not only about how they are behaving. However, your child may in fact be, or choose in the future to be, engaging in sexual relationships. Whether gay or straight, trans or bisexual your child will need the same rules, support and guidance in the home as before.



## **Dealing with-** Your Doubt

“Are you really sure?”...Before you ask this question ask yourself if you remember ever asking yourself, “Am I sure I’m heterosexual?” It may seem a funny question to ask, so imagine that first question being just as weird for your child. If they’ve gotten up enough courage to let you know they are gay or lesbian, they have probably already asked, and likely grappled with this question themselves a few times already. Consider how you first knew you were attracted to the opposite sex, or your partner? You just knew. Perhaps it was purely physical. Perhaps it was more emotional or romantic. Whatever the initial feelings, you just knew. The same applies for your child.

**If** you're reading this booklet it's likely that your child has recently shared an important part of themselves with you (or you suspect they have something to share) and you are looking for some answers. This is sure to be a confusing and emotional time, both for you and for your child. What can make this period easier on your child, on you and on the entire family is to move slowly, gain some perspective, and take this time to gather a bit more knowledge about what you've now learned and how to go about dealing with it appropriately.

**B L A C K**




**BLACK COALITION FOR AIDS PREVENTION**

**C • A • P**

The Black Coalition for AIDS Prevention (Black CAP) is a non-profit, community based, AIDS Service organization in Toronto that works with African and Caribbean people who are either infected or affected by HIV/AIDS. Black CAP's mission is to reduce the spread of HIV infection within Black communities, and to enhance the quality of life of Black people living with or affected by HIV/AIDS. Black CAP accomplishes this mission through various programs and services offered by its Prevention, Education, Support, and Outreach departments.

With funding from the City of Toronto - Access and Equity Program and the Community One Foundation, Black CAP chose to develop this resource booklet to help Black lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and questioning (LGBTQ) Black youth and their families with the "coming out" process. Black CAP also wants to support youth struggling with issues about sexuality, and who are feeling disconnected from the support of family. Black CAP recognizes that as a result of this isolation, homophobia and rejection, many LGBTQ youth are at greater risk for HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

In the process of creating this booklet, Black CAP consulted with, and gathered support from, a number of individuals and organizations. Special thanks to Supporting Our Youth - and the Black Queer Youth Group (BQY), staff and students at the Triangle Alternative School Program, our partners in the project, the African Caribbean Council on HIV/AIDS in Ontario (ACCHO), and finally our funders at the City of Toronto and the Community One Foundation.



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Graphic design, illustration and photography by Frantz Brent-Harris • [www.frantzbretharris.com](http://www.frantzbretharris.com)



# DEALING WITH BEING DIFFERENT

A Resource Guide for Parents of  
gay, lesbian, bisexual,  
transgender, queer  
and questioning  
Black youth.