



# Supporting Families, Parents and Carers of LGBTIQ+ Young People

Evidence shows that family acceptance is a key protective factor for LGBTIQ+ young people and plays a crucial role in their health and wellbeing. Family rejection or lack of family acceptance is a key risk factor for LGBTIQ+ young people, making them more likely to experience mental health distress, internalised phobias and stigmas and homelessness. Clinicians working with families can play an integral role in providing informed support and practical guidance to families, parents and carers of LGBTIQ+ young people to prevent these harms.

## Meeting families where they're at

Clinicians should connect with families at their current level of understanding, as well as their personal, cultural and religious context. From there, embark on a process of patiently assisting them to come to a more informed understanding of LGBTIQ+ identities.

If in their professional judgement it is safe to do so, clinicians should prioritise **building trust** with families of young LGBTIQ+ people by **hearing their stories** and **empathising** with them. **Validate** their feelings, anxieties and fears related to their young person's LGBTIQ+ identity. Then, clinicians can gently but firmly **address and dispel any myths**, stereotypes, misconceptions and assumptions about LGBTIQ+ experiences that may be held by family members. Clinicians should **share information** about the wellbeing of LGBTIQ+ communities that is evidence-based, accurate and up to date. This can include **sharing language and tools** to strengthen their knowledge and capacity to foster nurturing relationships with LGBTIQ+ young people in their care.

## Supporting Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Families

Families of diverse cultural, faith and linguistic backgrounds may require more nuanced responses from clinicians to ensure they are able to maintain their sense of cultural and religious values while arriving at a place of support for their LGBTIQ+ young person.

Clinicians can seek out culturally informed resources and support groups which show families that they, including LGBTIQ+ young people, are able to maintain all aspects of identity simultaneously in a way that fits for them.

## Linking families into community and professional supports

Clinicians can facilitate referral pathways to further support families of LGBTIQ+ young people. Local or online support groups and networks, often facilitated by other parents and carers of LGBTIQ+ young people, offer invaluable shared experience and a sense of community for this new experience.

It's also important for parents and carers to be empowered to take care of their own needs for emotional and mental health support to avoid leaning on the LGBTIQ+ young person to help them process this experience. Clinicians can guide families, if appropriate, to seek individual counselling support in order to strengthen their own capacity and resources to best show up for an LGBTIQ+ young person.

### Empathy and Validation

Encourage families to recognise their child's needs through open and honest dialogue. In small but significant ways, a family's actions to validate LGBTQIA+ identities can signal to and reassure a young person that they are loved, that they belong and that they are supported. When families acknowledge and connect with the vulnerability of 'coming out/inviting in' they can help validate an LGBTQIA+ young person's feelings, concerns and anxieties about the process and help them feel more understood, believed and accepted.

### Open and Authentic Communication

Support families to develop effective and culturally appropriate communication skills to foster open and supportive dialogue with an LGBTQIA+ young person. Skills like active listening, expressing unconditional love and acceptance, avoiding assumptions and judgmental language.

### Support for siblings

Support families to provide age-appropriate information about LGBTQIA+ identities to siblings of LGBTQIA+ young people to help them understand and accept their sibling's identity. Help reduce misunderstandings and stigma while being sensitive to the needs siblings may have at home, as well as considering how this may be impacting their relationships with their peers and at school.



### Patience and Open-Mindedness

Understanding and accepting an LGBTQIA+ child or sibling can be a complex and sometimes long process for families. Clinicians can guide families to be patient with an LGBTQIA+ young person as they explore and express who they are at their own pace. Help families to avoid putting pressure on the young person to fit any fixed idea or timeline around their identity that the family may hold.

## Instilling affirming parenting practices

Clinicians can resource families to use affirming parenting practices that promote a positive, safe and nurturing environment for LGBTQIA+ young people to be themselves. This can include guiding them with:

### Providing a Safe Space

Instill the importance of home as a source of safety and protection where LGBTQIA+ young people should be celebrated to explore, express and be their authentic selves. Families should also consider making decisions collaboratively with an LGBTQIA+ young person about what, how and when information is disclosed to family friends and relatives and modelling boundary setting with them. This ensures safety is also embedded in existing relationships and dynamics outside of the home.

### Managing Distress

Mental health clinicians can aid parents to recognise signs of distress in an LGBTQIA+ young person and provide them with strategies to manage such crises. This includes understanding the impact of discrimination, bullying, or internalised stigmas on the young person's mental health and wellbeing and reinforcing positive messages of unconditional love and support for the young person.



**Twenty10 is an LGBTQIA+ organisation based in Sydney that provides young people with housing, counselling, and social support across NSW.**

This resource is part of Safe and Affirmed Guidesheets, a series of five resources created by Twenty10 for clinicians and youth mental health workers. To view the series, **scan the QR code.**

Twenty10 delivers LGBTQIA+ inclusivity training to workplaces and schools. [Click here to learn more.](#)