



PRISM IN PRACTICE

**A RESOURCE FOR PARENTS OF
LGBTIQA+ YOUNG PEOPLE**



ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This is a resource for parents and carers of LGBTIQ+ young people who are ready to explore some of the learned lessons and wisdoms from Twenty10. It was developed as part of a suite of resources for health workers and parents who are supporting LGBTIQ+ young people. This resource provides guidance to courageously yet intentionally go deeper within yourself, reflecting and integrating what it really means to you to be the parent of an LGBTIQ+ young person. The information provided is for anyone who is curious about what it means to be the parent, carer, kinship or safe adult to an LGBTIQ+ young person, and aims to strengthen your sense of connection, of being, of knowing and of identity – all of which LGBTIQ+ communities have much to share.

The resource shares advice on:

- How to meet your uncertainties or anxieties and move towards calm
- How to shift from shame toward pride or from fear to strength
- How to cultivate peace and connection in your family relationships
- Building an expansive understanding of your LGBTIQ+ child

However you have come to this resource, we invite you to explore it at your own pace, perhaps support. As this is a parenting resource, we encourage you to be mindful that it remains in parental hands and some of the more challenging themes are explored away from any LGBTIQ+ child. We welcome you to take these learnings with you along your journey.

This resource adds to a rich collection of existing resources for parents of LGBTIQ+ young people, covering language, pronouns, advocacy, supporting gender affirmation, finding community, navigating support systems, and more, which you can access via the QR code on the rear page of this resource.

THE WISDOM OF LGBTIQ+ YOUNG PEOPLE

At Twenty10, we believe that children and young people know themselves, and we trust them when they tell us who they are. This core value has been learned throughout our 40+ year history of supporting LGBTIQ+ young people, and it underpins the life-saving work that we do.

We proudly propose that belief and trust in your young person's sense of self can act as a guiding light for anyone who holds the privilege of caring for LGBTIQ+ young people, including parents and carers. Learning to notice and support the wisdom of our child or young person, can empower them to trust themselves and support their self-esteem. It can also reduce the pressure on us to know all the answers and create the conditions for a strong relationship with them.

When we become aware of when and how we assume to know better than our child, we can avoid disconnecting from them through minimising and dismissing their unique experiences and emerging inner knowings.

To practice care in this way, we enact our responsibility to provide safety, stability and nurture, without the pressure to have all the answers. Moreover, when we show young people that we trust their sense of who they are (even when they don't have all the answers yet!) – that we believe them and believe in them – they learn that they can trust themselves as well. It's about walking side by side with them.

LEARNING TO RE-THINK WHAT WE KNOW

As we learn about LGBTIQ+ identity and experience, we are asked to think critically about the social roles and scripts that we learn – the “rules” about gender, sexuality and body expectations that we are taught long before we reach adulthood. LGBTIQ+ young people embark on this path of questioning and learning as they try to find their place in the world. Parents and carers are also presented with an opportunity to revise our own ideas alongside the young person.

Fathers can learn more about this in A Resource For Dads of LGBTIQ+ Young People via the QR code on the rear page.

No matter where you grew up, you have likely been taught unspoken rules about gender, sexuality and bodies, that can take a long time to re-think or unlearn. Some of these rules may be specific to your community or culture, while others will be common across cultures. For example, we may have been taught to think of men as tough and powerful, and women as sensitive and nurturing. We may have learned early that everyone grows up to marry someone of the opposite gender, or that everyone wants to have children.

As society has progressed, we know there are many different ways to be a man, woman or person, to have a body, and to have relationships, and it’s not that simple. Yet a lot of our automatic assumptions can create internal “clutter” for us especially when we learn our child is LGBTIQ+.

Clutter: a large amount of confusing and overwhelming information.

JOURNAL PROMPT

These prompts are designed to guide a process of updating ideas, beliefs and attitudes about gender, sexuality and bodies and sorting through internal “clutter” to develop a clarity which works better for us and our children.

- *I was taught that men... _____
but I know that isn't true because men also... _____*
- *I was taught that women... _____
but I know that isn't true because women also... _____*
- *I doubted my child was gender/sexuality diverse, because... _____*
- *I held concerns for my child's future happiness due to their bodily difference because... _____*
- *I expected my gender diverse/transgender child to... _____
because my understanding of their gender identity is... _____
(E.g. I expected my trans child to “wear make-up” because my understanding of their gender identity is “girls wear make up”)*
- *When I see someone who expresses both masculine and feminine (e.g. a little boy wearing nail polish, or a girl who loves her football jersey), I feel... _____*
- *If there wasn't such pressure to conform to gender expectations and I could be or do anything I wanted, I would really like to ... _____*

YOUR OWN PARENTAL IDENTITY

One of the magical parts of being a parent is the undeniable ways our young people impact and change us. When the days are long and demanding, time and space to consider how you are changing, can be a precious luxury.

Below are some prompts that may help you explore what your child's identity, experience or bodily difference means to you as a parent, alongside your parental role.

JOURNAL PROMPT

- *Before I had my own family, to me being a parent meant...* _____
- *Now, the things that feel important to me about being a parent are...* _____
- *The values that are important in our family are...* _____
- *Looking back at my early experience, I learned that parents of LGBTIQ+ people were...* _____
- *When I think about having an LGBTIQ+ child, the initial feelings that arise in me are...* _____
- *Describe how your feelings about having an LGBTIQ+ child have changed over time.* _____
- *Now that I know my child is LGBTIQ+, my identity as a parent is evolving to...* _____

Reflection like this will help you to be changed in a positive way by your child, strengthening the relationship between you.

YOUR OWN PARENTAL ROLE

Undeniably the role of a parent requires providing for the basic and developmental needs of your child. This role can be hugely demanding and require your flexibility, patience, skills and learning throughout your child's life, as well as depending on the individual needs of each child. The role of parent to an LGBTIQ+ child or young person can also require specific things, such as:

- Educating yourself and others
- Being open to new information and learning
- Advocating for your child and family
- Being an ally to your child
- Being aware of what is required of you publicly and privately

It is important to consider your reserves and capacities to enact the tasks and skills that your role requires of you, and prioritise ensuring you are well-resourced for the job. Many parents find it helpful to seek support from LGBTIQ+ organisations and/or professionals, 'which you can via the rear page of this resource. You are not alone.

It can also be useful to consider the ways that your parental role and identity align, and how they might be different.

A NOTE ON GRIEF

You may hear conversation about parents of LGBTIQ+ children experiencing grief when they realise the expectations and imagined future for their child may not match with the reality. Some parents share feelings of shock, confusion, sadness or loss associated with their child's LGBTIQ+ identity.

Here, we remind parents and carers that for sexuality and/or gender diverse young people, it can be hurtful and invalidating to know that you are experiencing a sense of loss or grief about them being authentically themselves. For many young people, sharing who they are with those closest to them is an incredibly personal and vulnerable disclosure. Being met with sadness or grief can feel greatly hurtful. For parents, using the language of grief could further internalise negative or phobic attitudes about LGBTIQ+ people, which can deepen distress for us and them.

Some parents of children born with innate variations of sex characteristics (intersex) may also experience similar feelings of shock, confusion, sadness or loss when they learn about their child's bodily differences. This may be prior to birth, at birth, in early years, in adolescence or adulthood. Learning of these differences may also come with pressure or even coercion to make medical or surgical decisions at a stressful time.

An important note: Be mindful of what you share with your child about the more difficult feelings. There are parent groups and professionals who are available to talk with you about these feelings.

JOURNAL PROMPT

The reflection questions below are designed to support healthy emotional processing of feelings of loss, exploration and critique of what is lost, and to help you identify things to celebrate and support in your child's future. You may also substitute the word loss, for other words such as confusion, shock, sadness or uncertainty. Use the words that feel meaningful and right for you.

- When I learned my child is LGBTIQ+ my feelings of loss felt like... _____ and looked like... _____
- When I think about my child's identity, I feel that I have lost/am losing... _____
- The parts of my imagined future which feel uncertain because of my child's identity are... _____
- My child is LGBTIQ+ and they are also still... _____
- What I am learning about the life my child wants to live is... _____
- I can honour that I may have lost... _____ and look towards getting to know my child more deeply and celebrate their future.

Parents need space, support and time to pass through new and unfamiliar feelings and learning, toward being able to genuinely affirm and celebrate who your child is. Fears and worries about the lives and futures that LGBTIQ+ young people will have access to are understandable, so finding positive LGBTIQ+ role models, whether publicly or locally known, can also be an important and helpful way to cultivate a hopeful vision for yourself and your family. You are also encouraged to connect with support organisations specific to the identity or experience of your child—we have a list of organisations here.

“My child sharing with me who she is feels like one of the greatest gifts I have ever received. To miss out on truly knowing her would be a real loss, as being in the orbit of someone who has an incredibly developed sense of self, and the bravery to share, is a real honour”

Carlie, parent and member of Parents for Trans Youth Equity

A NOTE ABOUT SIBLINGS

We know that families can be significantly disrupted when there is too much focus on the LGBTIQ+ child, especially if that focus is based on harmful or misplaced beliefs about being LGBTIQ+. When parents learn that one child in the family is LGBTIQ+, attention and resources can be drawn towards them. While this attention may feel necessary, at times it can also complicate the family dynamic, and siblings may be left feeling disregarded.

Parents are in positions of power in the family, and you can role model normalising diversity and avoiding problematising the LGBTIQ+ child.

Too much focus may look like:

- Spending significantly more time pre-empting or responding to the needs of the LGBTIQ+ child than other children
- Most of your family conversations are about the LGBTIQ+ child
- Assuming that other children are fine, okay, or have less needs
- Noticing feelings of disconnection with other children

If you notice this pattern within your family and yourself, the below tips may help.

- You can reassure each person in the family that you love and accept them for who they are. Ask them, “what can I do to help you feel that more?”
- Find ways for shared activities, meaning or purpose for the whole family
- Seeking support from other parents of LGBTIQ+ young people, and/or professionals, to help manage your own uncertainties and questions.
- Ensure your LGBTIQ+ child has the supports and resources they need.
- Ensure that any other children also have the supports and resources as needed.

FINDING NEW STORIES

Positive family stories help give shape to the world around us, and provide us with meaning, understanding, safety and belonging. As children grow, they absorb the stories they hear from family – especially those that parents and carers share with them. When a family story includes and affirms an LGBTIQ+ young person, it can help them to feel more at ease and confident in themselves as they grow.

For so long, stories about LGBTIQ+ people, their lives and experiences, have been marred by deficit, negativity, loss and fear – and it is common for these stories to preoccupy and concern parents of LGBTIQ+ young people.

These negative stories are incomplete interpretations of LGBTIQ+ experience and identity. As long as LGBTIQ+ people have experienced discrimination and marginalisation from others, LGBTIQ+ communities have also written and shared their own stories of strength and empowerment. More and more, LGBTIQ+ people and communities are sharing stories of resistance and resilience, of pride and joy, of diversity and expansiveness and freedom.

Finding family stories which reflect the beauty and possibility of LGBTIQ+ identity and experience can be a powerful way for parents and carers to support their young person, while also strengthening our foundations of affection and positivity for how our family is changing.

We encourage you to use the below prompts to begin to articulate, and if needed, re-imagine the story of your family and LGBTIQ+ child and infuse it with the values and affirmation that are important to you.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

- *Other parents say my LGBTIQ+ child's experience must be "really hard", but I think...*

- *When I first learned my child was LGBTIQ+, I felt... _____
But now I feel... _____*
- *The messages I want to pass on to my kid(s) about our family are... _____
_____*
- *When I think about it, queerness/transness/bodily diversity has... _____
_____ in common with our values/culture/faith.*
- *What I am learning from my queer/trans/intersex child is... _____
_____*
- *The positive, inclusive LGBTIQ+ role models we have in our broader family or community are... _____*

For some, this may be a shared activity with your LGBTIQ+ child. For others, this may not be appropriate or feel good to do together. However you explore them, we hope that you will let these new stories – filled with love and care for your children and family – will leave you feeling stronger, prouder and more connected.

Congratulations on feeling and working your way through this resource. We hope you have found bits that sing to you, challenge you and help you to find pride and peace in your child, your family and yourself. If you are looking for additional supports, please see the QR code on the rear page.

This resource was funded by NSW Health, and developed by Twenty10 in collaboration with **InterAction for Health & Human Rights**, **PTYE - Parents for Trans Youth Equity** and **Ari Heart, Trans Wellbeing**.

Twenty10 supports LGBTIQ+ young people aged 12 - 25 across New South Wales with specialised housing, counselling, care coordination, brokerage and a wide range of early intervention social support programs. We are also the NSW state partner for QLife, Australia's national phone and web based peer support service. These resources have been developed through our Learning and Development program, who deliver statewide training in LGBTIQ+ inclusivity and affirming practice.

Address 1 Bedford St, Newtown (Gadigal and Wangal Country) NSW 2042
Phone 02 8594 9555 | **Email** hello@twenty10.org.au
Website twenty10.org.au | **ABN** 14 925 105 160

Find more resources
and information here:



twenty10.org.au/prism-in-practice

