

YOUR CHILD JUST CAME OUT - A GUIDE FOR PARENTS & FAMILY

Safety & Wellness Guides for Queer Zimbabweans

When a child shares something deeply personal about who they are, it can be a pivotal moment for both of you. You may feel a mix of emotions: love, surprise, uncertainty, or even worry about what the future holds. No matter what feelings arise, what matters most is that your child has trusted you with an important part of their identity. Your response can shape their sense of self-worth, safety, and belonging. This guide is here to help you navigate this moment with care, compassion, and confidence. Whether your child is exploring their gender, sexuality, or something else entirely, they need to know that they are loved and accepted. You don't have to have all the answers right away what matters most is showing up with an open heart, a willingness to learn, and the reassurance that they are not alone.

STAY CALM AND OPEN-MINDED

Your child's decision to share this with you is a sign of deep trust. It's natural to have questions, emotions, or even uncertainty about what this means, but your first reaction is crucial. Remaining calm, present, and open-minded will reassure your child that they are safe with you.

- Listen attentively: Allow your child to speak without interruptions or assumptions. Let them share their feelings and experiences in their own way.
- Be patient: This may be something they have been thinking about for a long time, and they may still be figuring things out. Your understanding and patience will mean everything.

AFFIRM THEIR IDENTITY

The most powerful thing you can do in this moment is to affirm your child. No matter where your emotions stand, they need to hear that they are loved, accepted, and valued exactly as they are.

- Use their correct name and pronouns (if applicable): If your child has shared a name or pronouns that reflect their identity, making an effort to use them shows your respect and support. Mistakes are okay—what matters is that you try.
- Express your unconditional love: Reassure your child that who they are does not change how you feel about them. Your love and support can reduce anxiety, loneliness, and emotional distress.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

It's okay to not know everything, what's important is your willingness to learn. Educating yourself will help you better understand your child's experience and provide the support they need.

- Read books, articles, and research: Learn about gender, identity, and the experiences of young people who navigate these journeys. Reliable sources can help you gain clarity and empathy.
- Understand potential challenges: Your child may face discrimination, bullying, or mental health struggles. By learning about these realities, you'll be better equipped to advocate for them and provide guidance.

REASSURE THEM

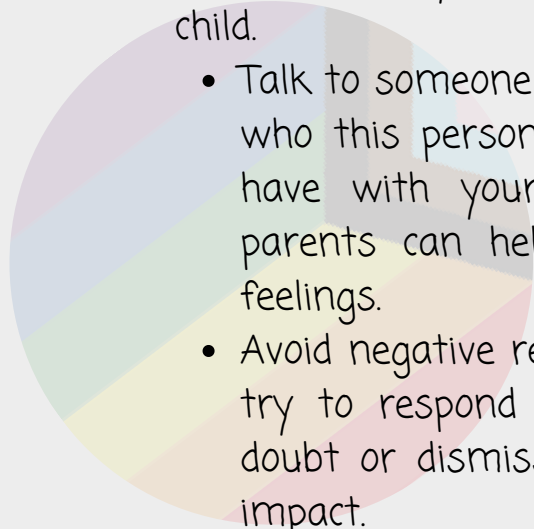
Coming out can be nerve-wracking, especially if your child is unsure how you or others will react. Let them know they are safe with you.

- Emphasize their safety and dignity: Reassure your child that they do not have to go through the challenges of being a sexual/gender minority alone and that you will stand by them if they encounter challenges.
- Discuss next steps together: If they want to share their identity with others, let them lead the conversation. Offer to help but respect their choices. Make sure you do not out your child to people whom they are not ready to share their identity with.



ADDRESS YOUR OWN EMOTIONS


If you feel confused, worried, or even overwhelmed, that's okay. You are allowed to have emotions, but it's important to process them in a way that does not place additional stress on your child.

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- Talk to someone you trust: A friend (put some thought into who this person is and the relationship if any they may have with your child), therapist, or support group for parents can help you work through your thoughts and feelings.
 - Avoid negative reactions: Even if you don't fully understand, try to respond with kindness and curiosity rather than doubt or dismissal. Your first reaction can have a lasting impact.



BE READY FOR QUESTIONS

Your child might have questions for you or you may have questions for them. Creating a space for open dialogue will strengthen your relationship.

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- Encourage honest conversations: Let your child know they can talk to you without fear of judgment.
 - It's okay to say "I don't know": You don't have to have all the answers. Acknowledge their experiences, and learn alongside them.

SUPPORT THEIR SOCIAL CIRCLE

Your child's well-being is not just about your relationship with them it also includes the people around them. A supportive social environment is key.

- Encourage healthy friendships: Help your child connect with understanding and affirming peers or support groups.
- Address bullying or discrimination: If your child faces harm at school or in their community, stand up for them and work with educators or community leaders to ensure their safety.

KNOW WHEN TO SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT

Coming out can bring up complex emotions for both parents and children. If you notice signs of distress in your child, seeking professional guidance can be a helpful step.

- Find an affirming therapist: A mental health professional with experience in gender and identity can provide support for both your child and yourself.
- Consider family or peer support groups: There are communities for parents navigating similar journeys, offering connection and reassurance.

CELEBRATE THEIR COURAGE

Coming out is a deeply personal and often difficult step. Your child has chosen to share this part of themselves with you, and that is something to honor.

- Acknowledge this moment: A kind word, a favorite meal, or simply saying, "I'm so proud of you" can mean the world to them.
- Be there through the highs and lows: There will be challenges, but your continued love and support will strengthen your relationship.
- Check in regularly and take your time.

THINGS TO AVOID WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU

- Dismissing or Invalidating Their Identity
 - "It's just a phase."
 - "You're too young to know for sure."
 - "Are you sure? Maybe you're just confused."
- Reacting with Shock, Anger, or Disbelief
 - "This can't be true."
 - "I don't believe you."
 - "Where did you get this idea from?"
- Centering Your Own Emotions
 - "This is really hard for me."
 - "I feel like I've lost the child I knew."
 - Crying in distress or making them comfort you instead of the other way around.
- Threatening or Using Guilt
 - "You're breaking our family apart."
 - "What did I do wrong as a parent?"
 - "Do you know how hard this is going to be for us?"
- Bringing Up Religion or Cultural Expectations
 - "This goes against everything we believe in."
 - "What will the family/community think?"
 - "You know this isn't natural, right?"

THINGS TO AVOID WHEN SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU

- Blaming External Influences
 - "This is just social media influencing you."
 - "You must have picked this up from your friends."
 - "This wouldn't be happening if you weren't exposed to certain things."
- Refusing to Acknowledge Their Identity
 - Ignoring the conversation and pretending it never happened.
 - Continuing to use the wrong pronouns or name on purpose.
 - Changing the subject or refusing to engage in further discussions.
- Trying to Fix or Change Them
 - "Maybe you should talk to a therapist to figure this out." (If implying that their identity is a problem.)
 - "Let's wait and see before we tell anyone."
 - Signing them up for conversion therapy or seeking ways to 'correct' them.
- Telling Them to Keep It a Secret
 - "Don't tell anyone else until we figure this out."
 - "Your grandparents don't need to know."
 - "This will make life harder for you—why not keep it private?"
- Withdrawing Love or Support
 - Acting distant or cold after they come out.
 - Refusing to hug or show affection like you did before.
 - Threatening to kick them out or cut them off financially.