

A GAY MAN'S SUGGESTIONS FOR PARENTS

- Provide an atmosphere of acceptance that will make it easier for your child to come out to you when he/she is ready. This is a great gift you can give. Encouraging your child to deny the truth or trying to deny it yourself will only make things worse.
- Inform yourselves so you understand that this is not something your child is choosing. I believe it is literally abusive (though perhaps uninformed) to suggest this. It only compounds your child's own pain and may well drive a wedge between the two of you.
- Holding out the hope that this is just a phase or will change is to keep yourself in denial. This will only hurt both you and your child. This is the grieving process, but healing doesn't really come until you reach the acceptance stage. You can't get there without effort sometimes. But it is important to get there.
- Be sure your child knows that you will listen to them in a non-condemning manner. Do all you can to keep the doors of communication open and help to affirm their (perhaps) fragile self-esteem. I may not bring up "the subject" with my parents or others, but I welcome the chance to discuss this when the door is opened in a non-threatening, non-judgmental manner. Be sure to indicate that you are willing. Keep opening the doors of communication yourself.
- Let your child know that is more important to you to be authentic than to conform. You may well grieve that your child will not marry and will not likely be a parent. But is it more important to you to help them through the pain of coming out and being authentic than to later have to come out to a spouse and children? Denial often ultimately brings more pain for all involved.
- Try to understand that your child is hurting, too. Your grief and shock may lead you to feel that the grief is all yours. Your child may portray to you that they're okay with coming out. But you don't know if that is a facade and you may never know the grief they themselves feel at not being able to conform. Often gay men are emotionally sensitive and feel far more pain than you realize.
- Do all you can to love unconditionally. Let your child know that their relationship to you will never change because of their sexuality. Don't even suggest to them that they will not be welcome in your home. Don't tell them, "well, you'll always be welcome, but not if you bring someone else along." Leave their morality to them. It is not your place to judge.
- Ask yourself whether you would rather they form one lasting union with a same-gender partner or have multiple relationships, often hidden from you. In which scenario would they be safest emotionally and physically? If you hope for them to form one lasting relationship (celibacy is rarely achieved, and they may only pretend to you that they are celibate to please you), then let them know that their partner is welcome in your home. Embrace your child's partner. Do you know how good it felt to have my partner's mother tell me I was now part of the family? And she is in her late 80's. Help your child feel normal! That would be a great gift.