

CHOICES

There are 5 common paths that other people have taken.

- 1. Staying within your faith community.** Some find acceptance, others decide that living with conflict is easier. Some choose to avoid conflict or rejection and remain “in the closet.” For many, changing religion is not a viable option. So they continue with the familiar and find peace there. This is common and a legitimate choice for many family members and LGBT people themselves.
- 2. Encourage change within your faith community.** Some people choose to work to create a space within their congregation that is welcoming to LGBT People and their families. Check out the PFLAG Faith Field Guide (www.pflag.org/faithfieldguide) for ways to make your community more welcoming.
- 3. Changing branches or congregations within your faith.** You might consider finding another congregation where you will feel more comfortable. The open and affirming communities offer people a way to stay in their faith tradition, but in a setting more consistent with their evolving beliefs and needs.
- 4. Investigating different faith communities.** Some people discover that their congregation is unwilling or unable to meet their new spiritual needs, or even actively works against LGBT inclusion. For some of these people, leaving the tradition, which may have been a long time spiritual home and refuge, can be an emotional and difficult decision. Don't go on the search alone. Visit www.pflag.org/faith for help.
- 5. Finding faith of your own.** Before you decide to leave your faith or organized religion altogether, be sure to reach out to others who have been faced with a similar decision. Visit a PFLAG chapter near you.

PFLAG HOUSTON

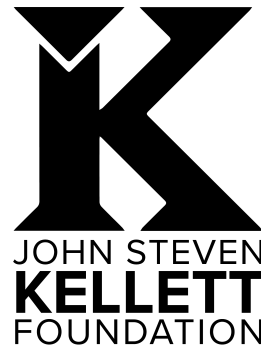
P.O.Box 667655
Houston, TX 77266-7655

www.PFLAGhouston.org

713-46-PFLAG
(713-467-3524)

helplinePFLAGhouston@gmail.com

We have a monthly general meeting as well as several facilitated small support groups available throughout the month. Check our website for times and locations.



Faith & Families



Adapted from Faith in Our Families: Parents, Families and Friends Talk About Faith, Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

www.pflag.org

BEGINNING
Learning that a family member or friend is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBT) can pose new questions about your faith and may prompt you to re-evaluate beliefs you previously took for granted. You are not alone. Talk about your loved ones and talk about your faith. Remember that your loved one is the same person you loved and supported before you knew about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Sharing this part of yourself with you can be the beginning of a more open relationship.

DISCOVERY
The first step on this spiritual path for many people is to get immediate support. Finding that your child or loved one is LGBT raises many questions. Getting answers to those questions will pave the way for understanding and acceptance. FLAG provides this support. You will find other families who are having a similar experience, as well as those who have taken this journey and are now committed to helping people who are starting theirs. FLAG chapters host support groups that are non-judgmental, confidential, and will provide the space you need to start getting answers and having conversations about how this revelation connects to your faith.

FAITH

Many scholars and religious leaders of various faith communities encourage critical engagement with sacred texts. Still, asking questions can be scary and the answers you find may be life-altering.

Some of the most common questions

include:

- What is my religion teaching about being LGBT?
 - Are there other people from my religion who have navigated this path before? How have they reconciled religious teachings?
 - What place do LGBT people and their family have in my religion?
 - Does my religion formally provide support for LGBT people? What kind of support is it healthy or accurate? If not, where can LGBT people and their family find support?
 - Are there various or conflicting views about LGBT people within my faith community?
 - What are the personal views of my religious leaders on this topic?
- Asking the questions and exploring possibilities are important first steps. You don't have to go through this alone. Find other families and take the journey together. Find a friend, spouse or partner, small group of people, or an entire FLAG chapter. It is important that you share with people who can listen without judgement.

CONSIDER

Some families find that they love their LGBT family member or friend, but their religion teaches them that their loved one is sinful, wrong, or required to change to be faithful. It may seem that the only solution is to avoid having a relationship with their loved one. Remember, many religious groups have decided to be more welcoming to LGBT people.

The Episcopal Church (USA), United Church of Christ, and Unitarian Universalists welcome and affirm LGBT members. Many denominations, including Presbyterians and United Methodists, have welcoming and affirming congregations. Within most faiths, there are many interpretations of religious texts on all issues including sexuality. Every religion advocates love and compassion, and emphasizes the importance of loving and intact families. Keep in mind that coming out to family and friends is one of the most difficult and frightening experiences LGBT people will ever have. The prospect of losing loved ones because of who you are is a reality for LGBT people everywhere. Finding peace between the acceptance of your loved one and your faith is a way for you to affirm your unconditional love for them. You are not alone.

AFTER MAKING A CHOICE, SHARE OUR STORY

As you become more open about your loved one, you may find that some individuals in your community will turn to you for support. By being a resource you can help begin a dialogue and create a more welcoming place for both LGBT people and allies. You do not have to have all the answers to be a resource! Remember that it is in compassionate conversations that you can change hearts and minds.