

# When Your Child Says, “I’m Gay”

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## 1. Introduction

A. A family storm?<sup>1</sup>

B. Big picture

1. The risks
2. The responses

## 2. The risks

A. Risks in the environment

1. Historical expectations of orientation change<sup>2</sup>

“By the start of the American cultural revolution in the 1960s, many mental-health professionals, clergy, and politicians supported the idea that homosexuality was a mental-health disorder that could be cured through some combination of prayer and ‘therapy,’ which included electroshock therapy, masturbatory reconditioning, and giving patients nausea-inducing drugs while forcing them to view homosexual erotica.” - Jonathan Merritt<sup>3</sup>

2. Knowing your expectations

- a) What would you like to see happen?
- b) What would you like a counselor to provide?

3. Re-setting your expectations

- a) Shattered illusions of family
- b) Picking up the pieces

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<sup>1</sup> “One of the most striking developments during the past few years has been a **lowering of the disclosure age** and the large number of sexual-minority youths who disclose to family members while still living at home. . . . Adolescents are **coping with family reactions earlier, more immediately, and for longer periods of time** than those who grew up during any previous generation” R. C. Savin-Williams, “*Mom, Dad, I’m Gay*”: *How Families Negotiate Coming Out* (APA, 2001), p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> “Based on the research that is available at this time, it appears as though some people do experience a change in sexual attraction, although most experience modest gains, and many share that they continue to have same-sex attractions at times. This would suggest that a **realistic expectation would not be categorical change** (from completely gay to completely straight), but rather modest shifts along a continuum of attraction. What I mean by this is that there is likely to be some reduction in attraction to the same sex, which for some people makes chastity an easier option than it was before. On the other hand, a few people may experience some increase in attraction to the opposite sex (or to a specific person, such as a spouse). Some report that this is heterosexuality, although they often also acknowledge some remaining attraction to the same sex.” Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Pastors, Parents, and Friends* (Bethany, 2010), p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> Jonathan Merritt, “How Christians Turned Against Gay Conversion Therapy,” *The Atlantic*, April 15, 2015 <https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2015/04/how-christians-turned-against-gay-conversion-therapy/390570/>

4. The surprising shared goal

- B. Risks in the home

1. Character
2. Roles
3. Obligations
4. Patterns

3. The responses

- A. The aftermath for the family

1. Immediate aftermath
  - a) Shock
  - b) Loss
  - c) Hopelessness
  - d) Shame
  - e) Guilt
  - f) Fear

2. Is God in this storm?

“We draw nearer to God, not by trying to avoid the sufferings inherent in all loves, but by accepting them and offering them to Him.” - C. S. Lewis<sup>4</sup>

3. Starting to talk: what to avoid

- a) Blame
  - (1) Self
  - (2) Spouse
  - (3) Others<sup>5</sup>
- b) Dismissal
  - (1) Denial
  - (2) Distance
- c) Anger/disgust

"Human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires" (James 1:20).

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<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Four Loves* (Harvest, 1971), p. 122.

<sup>5</sup> “I wasn’t recruited, raped, or abused.” Mel White, *Stranger at the Gate: to be Gay and Christian in America* (Plume, 1995), p. 29.

d) Hasty argument

(1) Pressure

(2) Fixing

e) “The arm of the flesh”

“This is what the Lord says: “Cursed is the one who trusts in man, who draws strength from mere flesh and whose heart turns away from the Lord. . . . But blessed is the one who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him” (Jer 17:5,7).

(1) Leverage

(a) Support

(b) Family events

(c) God?

**“His parents confronted his sexuality in front of the Provo Temple with the hope that he would ‘feel the force of it.’ . . . Although the [young man] was unclear as to what his parents specifically hoped to achieve by this use of the Mormon Temple, the religious overtone to their dissatisfaction was apparent. In his words, ‘We had a very long, very, very argumentative conversation that got nowhere, and it was honestly probably **one of the worst experiences of my life.**”<sup>6</sup>**

(2) Ultimatum

One “benefit of a God-centered approach to conflict resolution” is that “it makes you less dependent on results. Even if others refuse to respond positively to your efforts to make peace, you can find comfort in the knowledge that God is pleased with your obedience. That knowledge can help you to persevere in difficult situations” - Sande & Johnson (p. 52).<sup>7</sup>

“If I’m only 2 percent responsible for a conflict, I’m 100 percent responsible for that 2 percent” - Sande & Johnson (p. 62).

#### 4. Another way

“I don’t understand at all what you’re going through, but I’m here and I love you.”<sup>8</sup>

#### 5. Decisions and dilemmas

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<sup>6</sup> Chana Etengoff and Colette Daiute, "Family Members' Uses of Religion in Post-Coming-Out Conflicts With Their Gay Relative," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 2014, Vol.6, No. 1, p. 38.

<sup>7</sup> Ken Sande & Kevin Johnson, *Resolving Everyday Conflict* (Baker, 2011), p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Bekah Mason, “Finding My ‘True Self’ as a Same-Sex Attracted Woman.” *Christianity Today*. June 2017 <http://www.christianitytoday.com/women/2017/june/finding-my-true-self-as-same-sex-attracted-woman-obergefell.html>

- B. Can storms be prepared for?
  - 1. How we talk about sexuality
  - 2. How we talk about politics
  - 3. How we talk about romance
  - 4. How we talk about singleness
  - 5. How we talk about the Christian life
  
- 4. Hope
  
- 5. Recommended resources:
  - A. Books
    - 1. Wesley Hill, *Washed and Waiting: Reflections on Christian Faithfulness and Homosexuality* (Zondervan, 2010).
    - 2. Mark Yarhouse, *Homosexuality and the Christian: A Guide for Pastors, Parents, and Friends* (Bethany, 2010).
  - B. Websites
    - 1. Spiritual Friendship: “Musings on God, Sexuality, Relationships”  
<https://spiritualfriendship.org>
    - 2. Living Out: Sam Alberry and other church leaders offer resources for fellow same-sex attracted Christians, their families, and their friends.  
<http://www.livingout.org/>