

How to Talk To Your Children About Homosexuality

A Guide for Parents

By Jeff Johnston

THRIVING
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PLEASE NOTE:

This resource does not provide information or advice about helping children or teens who have “come out” and identify as gay or bisexual, assisting those who are struggling with gender confusion, or counseling those who were sexually abused and may be questioning their sexual identity. Instead, this guide is for parents addressing their children about homosexuality when it is encountered in the culture.

For assistance and resources for serious concerns such as those listed above, please call Focus on the Family’s counseling service at 1-800-A-FAMILY (232-6459) weekdays 6:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. (Mountain Time). Please be prepared to leave your contact information for a counselor or chaplain who will return your call as soon as possible. The consultation is available at no cost to you. You may also reach our counselors online and arrange for a callback by filling out our Counseling Request Form here: FocusOnTheFamily.webconnex.com/CounselingRequests.

In addition, we have online resources for help in these and other areas. Go to focusonthefamily.com and click on the “Get Help” button at the top of the page.

PRESCHOOL | AGES 0-6

FRAMING THE ISSUE: A FOUR-PART STORY

Teach your children a simple, four-part story of our world: God made a good world; people did not obey God and sinned; God forgives, saves and transforms those who follow Jesus Christ; and He will gloriously remake us and this world.

When children take in and process new information, they start from what they already know, connecting new information to their previous knowledge. **Before your children are even aware of homosexuality, begin by giving them a biblical view of the world.**

In other words, you are framing the issue for them by teaching them about God and His redemptive plan humankind. You are providing your children with a basic understanding of the world in which we live. We always want to start with what's good when talking about difficult subjects, so we begin by teaching about God's plan for us and our sexuality. That gives us a foundation for then discussing any problem issues.

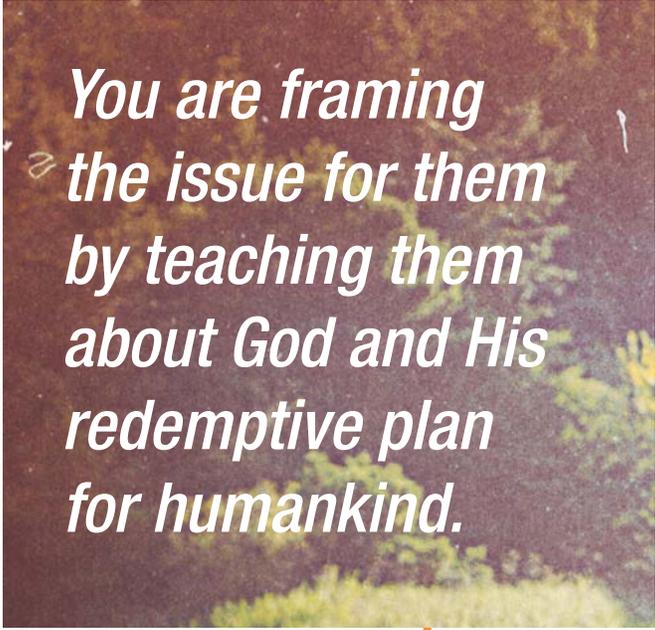
Find a good children's Bible or Bible storybook and read it with your child. As they grow and learn, this framework provides the starting place for discussing issues such as homosexuality.

Creation

- God made the earth and all that's in it; He is the source of all life.
- God made people in His image and loves us very much. You are deeply loved by God.
- God separated humanity into male and female. Both boys and girls (and men and women) are good, but different.
- Children come from a mother and father; God intended parents to love, care for, protect, teach and guide children as they grow.
- God gives us good gifts, like friendship, marriage and family.

The Fall

- Adam and Eve disobeyed God and sinned. They did not trust God and did what God told them not to do. They ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
- This had bad consequences, as sin and death entered the world.
- People do wrong things, even moms and dads, and we all need God to forgive us and help us do what's right.
- When we do something wrong, we admit it and ask other people to forgive us, too.



You are framing the issue for them by teaching them about God and His redemptive plan for humankind.

- Thankfully, God set about bringing redemption to the earth from the very beginning, promising to Eve that a Savior would come.
- This thread of salvation and redemption is woven throughout the Old Testament, growing and expanding, as God makes promises to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses and all Israel.
- All those promises are fulfilled in Jesus Christ, whose message is that all may come into the life and redemption God has promised and become His followers.
- The good news is that Jesus' life, death, burial and resurrection brings salvation and freedom from sin!
- When we choose to put our confidence in Jesus and follow Him, we are born into God's family. God gives His children the Holy Spirit to help, guide and transform us in the middle of a fallen world.
- God helps us to treat all people with kindness, even those who sin against us, who are different from us or with whom we disagree.

Glorification

- Our future union with Christ is portrayed in Scripture as a wedding feast, where we are united with Christ like a bride and her husband.
- Those who follow Jesus will be with Him forever in a new heaven and earth.
- The Bible tells us that this will be a world with no pain, sin or sadness.
- We have a future and a sure hope, because God has made these promises to those who follow Him.

Use simple Bible stories, such as the Creation story, to show how God made Adam and Eve for each other and created the first

marriage. Use the story of Noah to show the animals, two-by-two, male and female, going into the ark. A mommy animal and a daddy animal together have a baby animal.

Also **use examples from life** to teach these truths, explaining, for example, that Mom and Dad were married—marriage is a good gift from God. When a child sees something bad, you might explain how sin brought pain into the world. When your children start noticing that boys and girls are different, use that to talk about God separating humanity into male and female. Life is full of such teachable moments!

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Your family is traveling and visits a new city. It's June, right when school lets out for summer vacation. As you enjoy the sights, you begin to notice rainbow flags, t-shirts and displays, and your family starts to see same-sex couples holding hands. You've stumbled into a gay pride celebration, complete with parade and festivities. Your young son or daughter asks: "Why are those two men holding hands? Why are those two women kissing? What do all those rainbow flags mean?"

Possible Responses

These depend on the age of the child, his or her level of concern about this scenario and his or her verbal and abstract ability:

- “Because of God’s word, the Bible, we believe God made men and women, and He planned marriage to be between a husband and wife. But sin came into the world and causes all of us to do wrong things. One wrong thing some grownups do is try to change God’s plan for marriage so that two men or two women can marry.”
- “Not everyone believes and follows God’s plan for marriage, so sometimes two women will act like they are married. But they can’t really be a husband and wife, because they are both women. Sin has confused them, and they need God’s help to follow Him.”
- “God made marriage to be between a man and a woman. But not everyone obeys God and follows His plan. So sometimes two men will decide to marry. But we believe that marriage really is between a husband and wife.”
- “When men and women grow up, most of them get married. God made marriage to be between one man and one woman. But because we live in a world where people do wrong things, sometimes two men will get married. Jesus can help them.”

Word of Caution

At this age, you aren’t talking to your children about specific sexual activity; they’re not equipped to handle adult sexuality. Furthermore, we suggest waiting until kids are older before introducing terms such as “homosexuality,” “heterosexuality,” “gay,” “straight,” “LGBT” or any of its variants.

In addition, we also suggest not saying something like, “Those men are gay. Gay is when two guys like each other.”

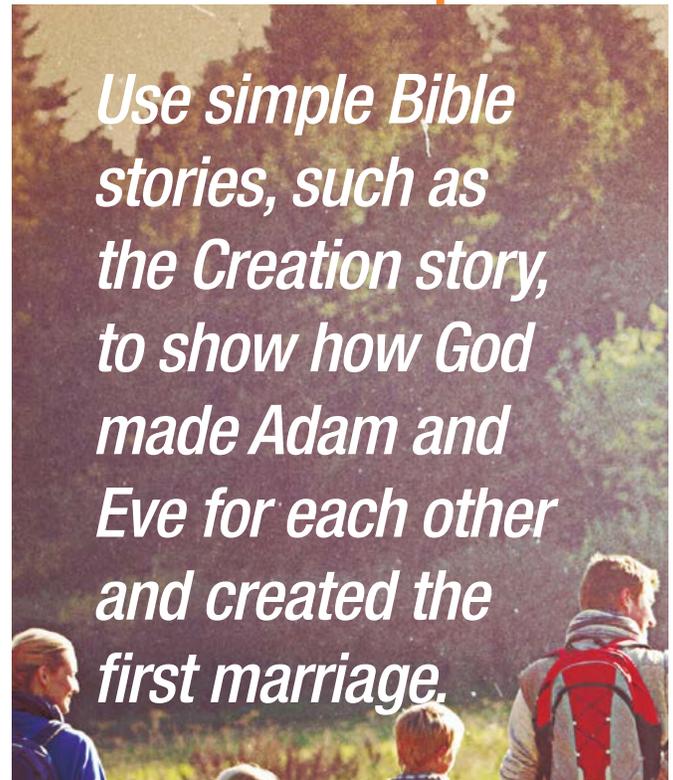
That’s confusing to boys, who at this age are developing a stronger internal sense of masculinity—primarily through distancing themselves from girls and identifying with and relating to other boys and men.

It’s very healthy and normal for a boy to have older boys and men who function as heroes or role models. Explaining homosexuality as “two guys who like each other” could prompt a young boy to doubt himself or his own feelings. He might think to himself, “I’m a boy and I like boys. Does that mean I’m gay?” Some children have come home from school lessons on homosexuality and asked this very question.

The same would absolutely apply to girls. We suggest you avoid such statements as, “Being homosexual or lesbian is when two girls like each other.” This takes what is a normal, healthy developmental stage—girls liking and connecting with each other or following older girls as role models—and equates it with homosexuality.

Reliable Resources

[Click here for helpful, reliable resources](#) for help understanding and teaching your children about marriage, relationships and sexuality.



ELEMENTARY | AGES 6-12

FRAMING THE ISSUE: THERE ARE DIFFERENT TYPES OF LOVE.

Setting the big picture about love, relationships and marriage will give your children a framework for thinking about these important issues. God has given humanity a number of good gifts, including marriage, love, friendship and family. As in the previous section, we want to start with God's good intentions before discussing problems and sin.

Borrowing on C.S. Lewis' ideas from [*The Four Loves*](#), **this would be a good age to explain to your children that there are different types of love:**

- Our “love” (or liking, really) for food, things and activities.
- Love for creation, including our care and concern for animals, pets and the environment.
- Friendship and love for our friends.
- Love for family: parents' love for children; children's love for mom and dad; brothers' and sisters' love for each other; love for other relatives.
- Marital love, which includes romantic or sexual love, the love between a husband and a wife.
- God's love for us and our responsive love to Him.

Children can compare and contrast these types of love, and you could discuss the different types of responsibilities and activities associated with these different levels of relationship.

Marital love has purposes and characteristics that are distinct from other loves. As appropriate, talk to your children about these marital traits, including:

- Permanence: Friendships may change, but marriage should last a lifetime.
- One man/one woman (monogamous): We may have lots of friends, children and family members, but only one husband or wife.
- Male and female: God separated humanity into male and female, marriage brings those back together.
- Oneness: Marriage unites a couple in a special way; that's why sexual expression is intended only between a husband and wife. Intimacy, pleasure and joy are a significant part of the marital union.
- Familial: Marriage between a man and a woman often brings forth new life—children.
- Symbolic: In the Bible, marriage is the primary picture of our relationship with God.
- Glorifying God: Because God designed marriage, when we follow His intentions we bring glory to Him.

Marital love has purposes and characteristics that are distinct from other loves.

Sadly, these good gifts from God are often misused because of human weakness and sin. **And the more important or higher a gift is, the greater impact it has when it is corrupted.** Explain that, as part of humanity's disobedience, love can be disordered, out of bounds or inappropriate. Homosexuality is one distortion of God's design for human love. Two men in a marriage relationship are missing something—the femininity of a woman. And two women who live as if they were married and raise a child together are depriving that child of the masculinity of a father in their home. Two moms can't be a dad.

We all need God's help setting our love in order. These various loves are designed to help lead us to the highest love—love for God. The good news is that through a relationship with Him, we can learn to love rightly, even loving those who don't follow God's plan.

Basic Concepts

- Your children need to hear from you directly that they may safely talk to you about difficult issues. Don't assume: Ask questions, listen well and encourage them to speak freely.
- They're also watching to see how you interact with others. Do you love and respect others? Do you speak truth courageously and gracefully?
- People are worthy of respect. As followers of Jesus Christ, we don't bully other people or use demeaning terms or expressions.
- You're now expanding their knowledge of male and female differences, why these matter, and how marriage brings the two halves of humanity together.
- Even human love—every type of love—has been damaged and affected by the Fall. That's why we don't just follow our own thoughts and feelings, but we emulate Christ's example and follow biblical teaching.
- Prepare your children to understand that not everyone has a Christian worldview, but we love and respect them anyway.

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

You're in the kitchen on New Year's Day, making breakfast and watching the Rose Parade, a family tradition. Your syrup-faced children are staring at the screen when a float goes by with two men holding hands while a pastor performs their wedding ceremony. Your children turn to look at you for a response.

Possible Responses

These depend on the ages of your children, their level of concern and their verbal and abstract ability:

- “We've talked about how God made marriage to be between a man and a woman. That's what the Bible teaches. But because of Adam's sin, the world is not as it was meant to be. Some men, because of the presence of sin in the world, want to marry other men. Some people agree with them, and are even willing to change God's design for marriage to have two men get married.”
- “You know how we've talked about different kinds of love, like friendship

and marriage? God’s design is like a road that—as we grow up—leads us to the marriage kind of love for someone of the opposite sex. But because of sin, the road is not as safe or direct as it should be. So sometimes boys or girls get off that road and grow up wanting to marry someone like themselves rather than the opposite sex.”

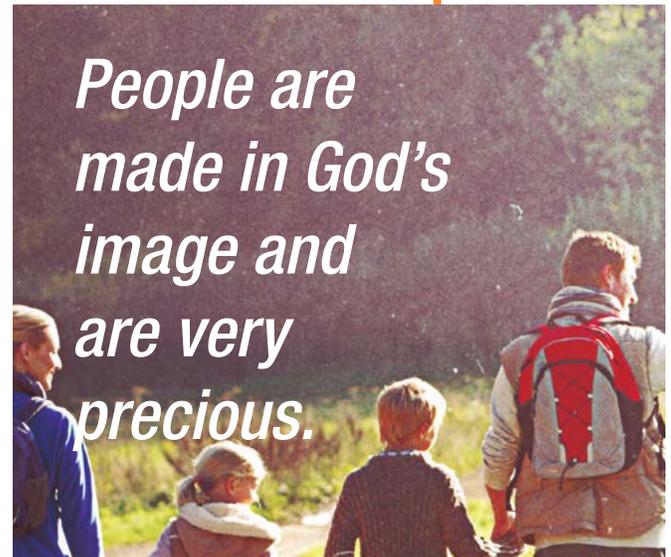
- “Marriage has always been what brings together a husband and wife—that’s God’s intention. But this world is not perfect, and not everyone follows God’s design. Some people have tried to change marriage so two men or two women can marry each other. The Bible says that’s not good.” Why don’t we pray right now for these men to come to Jesus and learn to follow God’s plan for their lives?”

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Your sixth grade daughter comes home from school. She is very quiet and seems upset. You ask what’s going on, and finally she blurts out, “Well, I was talking to Olivia at recess and some girls called us ‘lezzies.’ What’s a ‘lezzie?’” (Olivia is your daughter’s best friend.)

Possible Responses

- First, stay calm, keep cool and pray for wisdom. Then, ask your daughter questions, such as, “What do you think that word means? How did you feel when those girls called you names?” After she has a chance to describe her thoughts and feelings, you might give a simple explanation, such as, “That word is used to attack and belittle people. It’s short for ‘lesbian,’ which means a woman who has romantic attractions toward other women.”
- “Your friendship with Olivia is good. It was wrong of those girls to bully you and Olivia and call you names. Most girls your age have other friends who are girls, and sometimes they even have a ‘best friend.’ That’s really good and healthy. You and Olivia are precious and valuable to God.”
- “Words can really hurt, can’t they? Did you know that Jesus was called all kinds of names, too? He knows how you feel and wants to comfort you. Let’s pray right now to take those words off you and place them on the cross. Then, Mom and Dad will bless you by praying good words over you.”
- “I’m so sorry that happened to you and your friend. Mom and Dad want to protect you as much as possible, so we’ll be [talking to the school](#) about working to keep students from hurting other kids with mean words.”
- “Because **people are made in God’s image and are very precious, it’s wrong for anyone to call people mean names** or bully another person. It’s also important, when we are hurt, to work through to the point of forgiveness. Forgiving someone doesn’t mean that you don’t hold them accountable or try to stop them from hurting you again, but that you release them from your judgment. When you’re ready,



let's talk more and pray about forgiving those girls.”

Sadly, our hyper-sexualized culture is ready to steal innocence from children. And the rapid rise in visibility of homosexuality makes it all too easy for some to cast a shadow on the goodness and necessity of same-sex friendships. Same-sex friendships are a vital part of growing up, an integral part of the developmental process where girls identify and connect with other girls, and where boys connect and compete with other boys.

This is a stage where children may be hearing or seeing new homosexuality-related words from neighbors, classmates, television or social media. **If you hear them using inappropriate language, this would be the time to explain that God loves all people and they are worthy of being treated kindly**, so we don't use unkind words. Words are powerful and can hurt people.

You might also ask your kids questions, “Where did you hear that word? What do you think it means?” Then, you might have a short, frank discussion about God's design for healthy relationships and marriage. You can explain that those words describe things that go against God's design.

Some older children, especially those who understand how reproduction takes place, may ask about the sexual activity of homosexual men and women. Of course, answering this question is up to your discretion, but we suggest reminding children that when a husband and wife unite sexually, they form a single reproductive unit; their bodies were made to fit together naturally. Same-sex couples can never form a reproductive whole. You might tactfully and carefully tell them that homosexual activity is fundamentally different from a marital union.

Word of Caution

We suggest not saying something like, “Those men are gay. Gay is when two guys like each other.” That's confusing to boys, who at this age are developing a stronger internal sense of masculinity—primarily through distancing themselves from girls and identifying with and relating to other boys and men.

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JUNIOR HIGH & BEYOND | AGES 12 & UP

FRAMING THE ISSUE

“Who am I and why am I here? Do I have a purpose which God will help me discover? Or do I get to create my own meaning for myself and life?”

If your kids are at this stage and you haven't already taught them the big picture frameworks suggested previously in this resource, it's never too late! The four-part story of humanity, different types of love and the unique characteristics of marriage are topics you can still discuss with older children. Junior high students and older should know and understand these basic truths.

But these young people are also able to deal with more abstract concepts. So as part of setting the framework for talking about homosexuality, **it would be helpful to talk to your children about competing worldviews** that attempt to define who we are, why we are here and where we derive our answers to those questions. Let's set the stage by describing two competing worldviews.

The first comes from the Bible and historic Judeo-Christian teaching. It says that **God designed us, and that He created us for a purpose—to love and know Him, to love and know others and to do good work in this world.** We have intrinsic value and meaning that comes from being created in God's image and likeness. The good work that we do includes creating and nurturing families.

We are given gifts by God—thought, reason, creativity, family, relationships, sexuality, imagination, feelings, words and more—and as we grow and connect with God and others, we grow in these gifts and in our discovery of who we are. We have meaning and purpose, which we discover with God's help and begin living out.

Our bodies have purposes too, and when a husband and wife unite sexually, they form a complete reproductive system. Their union has the capacity to bring forth new life. Homosexual unions lack this significant capability.

Scripture also teaches that God gives us the ability to make choices. But our freedom to make choices has been damaged and distorted by sin. Sin causes us to want, pursue and do things that aren't good. And ultimately, freedom is lost as sin takes control. We are enslaved by sin—powerless and addicted, so to speak—and lose our ability to choose good. We are separated from God and unable to grow into all we were created to be. **The good news is that Jesus opened the kingdom of God to all—including those under sin's control.** Because of His life, death, burial and resurrection, we may become His children, be free from sin and discover our purpose.

In the Jewish and Christian view, marriage between a man and a woman was not created by man or originated by the government, but is a gift from God, with family flowing from the joining together of a husband and wife. Most societies have recognized the good of marriage between a man and woman and have set it



apart as the best place for sexual expression and creating family. Family is the basic building block of society, because from it comes the next generation of citizens. And though, again, these good gifts have been marred by sin, God is in the process of redeeming them for those who follow Him.

On the flip side, there are those who believe and teach that there is no God, and “the only real meaning I have in life is what I choose. I don’t have a purpose or ultimate end; I can be whatever I want.” We define ourselves and give our lives meaning.

In this view, everything is up for grabs—the self, sexuality, marriage, family and children. So marriage can be redefined to be something that it’s never been before—two men or two women. Sexual relationships only have the meaning that I choose to give them. Culture or the individual gives parameters for sexual relationships, with the current ethos being, “I can do whatever I want, as long as no one gets hurt.”

In this non-biblical, human-centered view, sexual activity has been separated from marriage and procreation, and even from being a male-female union. It becomes more about seeking pleasure or self-fulfillment.

Even male and female can become whatever I choose, or I may choose to identify as and express myself as neither, both or something completely different. If gender is a social or personal construct, then I can be whatever I choose. That’s one reason why groups push for the abolition of “male and female” and “mother and father” from documents and language. Or online groups may offer custom genders when people sign on.

Basic Concepts

- God created you to know and love Him, to know and love others, and to do good work with Him in this world—and in heaven beyond!
- Identity, meaning and purpose come from being created and redeemed by God, from being in His family.
- Marriage and family have real meaning, value and purpose too, not just what society or individuals assign to them.
- We treat all people with kindness, love and respect.
- We live in a world with competing worldviews; the Christian worldview is in direct conflict with the dominant, secular worldview that rules today.
- The world is growing more and more antagonistic toward Christians and our view of sex and sexuality; we must be bold and courageous, speaking the truth in love.
- Some individuals and churches are wrongly changing from a biblical worldview, rooted in Scriptural truth and centuries of church teaching, to a secular worldview, based on opinions and feeling.

REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

“Uncle Mike” has come out to the family as gay and is bringing his same-sex spouse to the upcoming family get-together.

Possible Responses

These depend on the ages of your children, their level of concern and their understanding of relationships and sexuality:

- “Uncle Mike now identifies as gay. That means he is romantically attracted to other men and embraces this as his identity. He is bringing his partner to our next family gathering. He and this other man live in a state that has redefined marriage, and they were married in a ceremony last month. **We still believe God designed marriage and sexual love to be between a husband and wife. Even though we don’t agree with Uncle Mike and his partner, we will treat them with kindness and respect.** Please come and talk to me or mom if you have any questions.”
- “You know God made us male and female in His image, and the Bible explains that God gave us marriage between man and a woman as a good gift. Well, not everyone follows God’s plan. Uncle Mike just told us he identifies as gay, and he wants to follow those feelings in his life. He is now married to a man and will be bringing his partner to the next family get together. We love Uncle Mike and pray he’ll return to following God’s design for marriage and sexuality.”
- “We don’t believe that Uncle Mike was born gay or that God made him homosexual. And we don’t know all the factors that have influenced him in that direction. We are going to love him and his partner, and we’ll pray for them. We disagree with his decisions, but that doesn’t mean we love him any less. It’s hard when someone you care about moves in a direction that is contrary to God’s plan.”



REAL-LIFE SCENARIO

Your teenage daughter has a good friend, “Bradley,” who has just confided in her that he thinks he’s gay. She’s come to you with questions and is looking for advice and support.

Possible Responses

Your daughter needs to know that you are safe to talk to, and that you love and care for her. She also needs to know that she can’t carry this issue alone, that it is not her responsibility to rescue or save Bradley, that you will help her set healthy parameters on her relationships and that you also care for her friend.

We believe the family is foundational for individual health, growth and security. However, while parents should be the safest people to talk with about sexual struggles, **this is not always the case.** So while we believe, at some point, this young man will need to talk with his parents about his homosexual struggles,

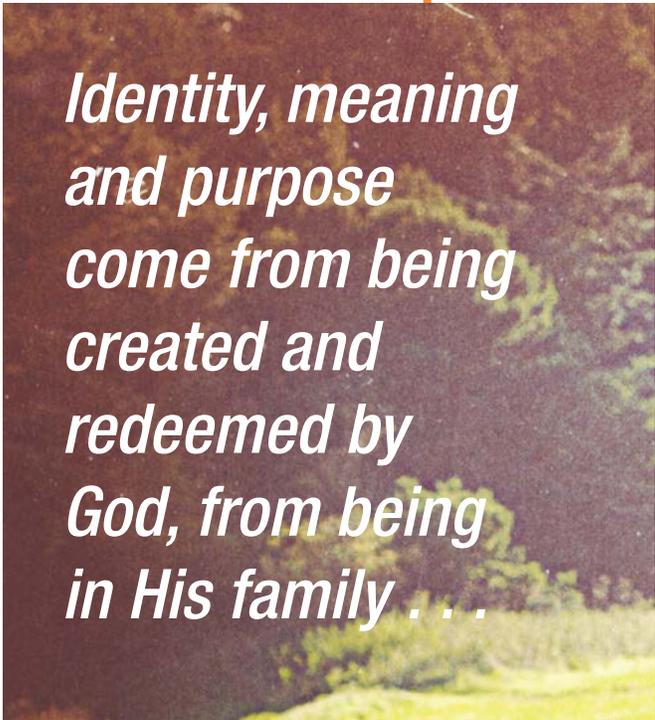
we don't suggest you rush out and tell them—or anyone else. Your role in this disclosure depends on your relationship with Bradley and his family. Not all parents handle this situation well. You should ascertain first, by discussing with him, whether his home situation is one of safety and security. Talk with him about how he thinks his parents will respond and about resources and help that are available if they don't respond well.

Depending on your family and Bradley's, you might reach out to involve him in some of your family activities, such as dinners, movie nights and game nights. Dad, in particular, should take the initiative here in connecting with Bradley. Our purpose in suggesting this is that your daughter's relationship with him shouldn't develop completely separate from and outside of your family. It's fairly common for guys who struggle with same-sex attractions to connect emotionally with girls and women. Where they often need help is in building healthy, non-sexual relationships with other boys and men. Here are some suggestions for talking with your daughter:

- “How can we best help you in this situation? You know what we believe about homosexuality, because we've talked about it. What kind of love and support do you need from us right now? How are you doing with what Bradley shared?”
- “You know that we believe God made us male and female in His image, not gay and straight. Those are man-made labels. But we also know that sexual struggles impact a person deeply. How can we communicate truth and love to Bradley in a helpful way?”
- “Sweetie, we're so glad Bradley felt safe to talk to you about these important issues. That's a heavy burden for him to carry. We are praying for God to move in Bradley's life so he will know God's love and follow Jesus. If he wants it, there is good Christian counseling that can help him understand his attractions and respond to them in a biblical way. Can we pray together for Bradley?”
- “It's important that Bradley's parents know, at some point, about the issues he's struggling with. If we can help by meeting with him and talking, we're willing to do that. We could help him understand what he wants from his family and how he thinks they might respond. We'd also be willing to be there when he talks to his family. Please let him know we are willing to do that.”

If your family does engage Bradley in relationship, it's important to communicate a few things:

- You love him no matter what. But love doesn't mean you agree with every choice he makes in response to having same-sex attractions.
- Encourage him not to identify too early or too strongly as gay. Encourage him to see his identity as a man created in God's image, and if he is a believer, his identity is primarily as a child of God, a follower of Christ. Those are more important than same-sex desires.



- Young people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual have a [greater number of health-risk behaviors](#), including early sexual activity, compared to those who identify as heterosexual. [One of the fastest growing groups with new HIV infections is boys and young men ages 13-24](#).
- Some [research](#) demonstrates that teens who identify as gay don't always have the same identity later in life. Encourage Bradley to begin following God's design for sexuality, in spite of same-sex attractions.

As mentioned in the previous section, some teens may ask about the sexual behavior of homosexual-identified men and women. Of course, answering this question is up to your discretion, but we suggest not going into a lot of detail. **Keep it short and simple, but honest.** Remind your kids that when a husband and wife unite sexually, they form a single reproductive unit; their bodies were made to fit together naturally. Same-sex couples can never form a reproductive whole. Homosexual activity is fundamentally different from a marital union.

Reliable Resources

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WE WANT YOUR BIBLICAL VALUES—AND THOSE OF YOUR CHILDREN—TO THRIVE IN TODAY’S CULTURE.

Realizing your children and teens may have other cultural and policy-related issues not addressed in this resource, we encourage you to:

- 1. SIGN UP** for our weekly, [mobile-friendly e-newsletter](#). *Thriving Values* brings fresh Christian commentary and ideas for involvement on a wide range of hot-button, cultural topics. And you’ll be the first to know when other resources become available.
- 2. SUBSCRIBE** to [Focus on the Family Citizen magazine](#). *Citizen* sets the record straight on the issues affecting your family, your community and your church. You’ll read about everyday Americans impacting the culture for Jesus Christ—and future generations.
- 3. BOOKMARK** Focus on the Family’s [Social Issues](#), [TrueTolerance.org](#) and [DayofDialogue.com](#) websites on your favorite browser. Each website is designed to equip, encourage and engage families to thrive.

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