

A Parent's Response: Voicing a Gay Identity



Teen: “I’m gay”

Parent: “What?”

What happens next?

Your adolescent son or daughter arrives home from worship practice and says,

“I need to talk to you . . .

(LONG pause). . . I am gay.”

Immediately questions flood your mind and rush like a stream out of your mouth, “*What do you mean? Are you sure? How long have you known? What does this mean for your future?*”

Overwhelming emotions intertwine with the questions: shock, fear, disapproval, fear, disappointment, and maybe even **resignation** for a parent who suspected the same sex attraction.

For many parents, especially evangelical Christians, this announcement comes as a total shock. As your adolescent shares and watches closely for your reaction, **you sit stunned trying to reorient yourself** to your surroundings and **control the panic rising in your throat.**

Most parents react with a **deep sense of loss, feelings of shame, panic, and aloneness** (Saltzburg, 2004). One Christian mom describes her reaction to her son’s disclosure as “being kicked in the gut”.

With this new information about your child: *How should you react?*

LISTEN MUCH/TALK LITTLE

For most parents, **there is a flood of emotion ranging from sadness to anger.** If possible, **put aside your own emotions and listen to your child’s heart.** Your child has been struggling with same sex attraction and this conversation for months, possibly years. This is a critical moment to listen. **Your child has taken a great risk of rejection to share their feelings with you.**

BE AFFIRMING WITH YOUR WORDS

1. You will always be my son or daughter.
2. Tell me how you came to this conclusion.
3. We will work through this journey together.
4. What do you need from me as your parent?

ASK FOR TIME TO PROCESS

Your child has spent many months processing these feelings. **You will need time to find safe people to share with, read and educate yourself, pray, and grieve.**

Most parents ask “*What could I have done differently? Is this my fault? What caused my child to be homosexual?*” While the causes of homosexuality have been widely researched and debated, at this point **there are no definitive causes of homosexuality** (Yarhouse, 2010).

While processing and finding resources, **continue to do the things that you enjoy** (i.e. *gardening, reading, motorcycles*). This will **keep your whole life from being absorbed by this relationship change** with your child.

*Taking time to process and accept what you are feeling as a parent is **essential to understanding** for your child as well as to continue developing a healthy relationship with them.*

FIND SAFE PEOPLE TO WALK THE JOURNEY WITH YOU

Most parents find this to be an unexpected and difficult journey. Dreams are shattered. Previously held thoughts of traditional marriage and family are set aside. It is essential to **find a few safe people to walk alongside** for strength and encouragement. Safe people care and uphold your confidence in them.

It is important **not to compromise your child’s disclosure** by sharing with those who are not confidential. Often times, **this is where a pastor or counselor can be of great assistance**. A counselor with specific training in dealing with same sex attractions is a bonus.

EDUCATE YOURSELF

Educating yourself about homosexuality helps you to gain respect for your teen and possibly gives common ground for a discussion regarding sexual identity. Conversely, *judgment closes the doors of communication and potentially alienates your son or daughter.*

One prolific writer and researcher around the combined topics of Christianity and homosexuality is Mark Yarhouse. He has **specific resources for parents and youth pastors** to help them address the topic of homosexuality with teens.

Dr. Yarhouse developed a [three tier distinction](#) to help those struggling with unwanted same sex feelings.

The First Level

“*I experience same-sex attractions*” is used to describe **feelings** men (6%) and women (4.5%) have **toward the same sex** (Laumann, Gagnon, Michael, and Michaels, 1994).

This **does not necessarily describe their behavior** but is a way to understand that for whatever reason **some people have attractions toward the same sex**.

The Second Level

“*I have a homosexual orientation*” describes men (2%) and women (1%) whose **feelings have been strong and persistent for a significant length of time**.

This would then lead that person to **describe their attractions as ‘homosexual’**.

The Third Level

“*I am gay*” is a socio-cultural label that people use to describe themselves. Because most researchers do not ask about “gay identity” there are not figures to report how many adhere to a gay identity.

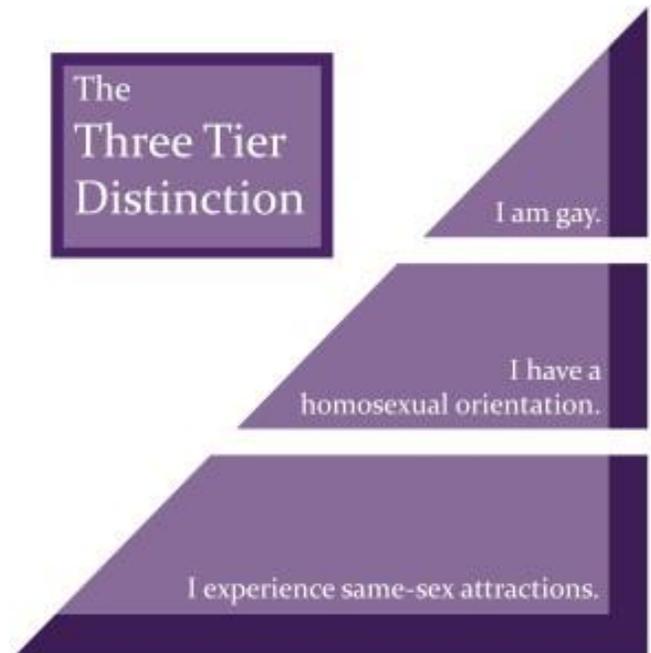
Essentially, this tier shows that **a larger group of people have same sex attractions than choose to have a homosexual orientation**. This can be helpful with adolescents who are only hearing the media message “*if you have same sex attractions then you are gay*”.

It is important for your son or daughter to realize **his or her identity is built around many factors**—only one of them is sexuality.

FOCUS ON YOUR PERSONAL JOURNEY

Pray, read the Word, fast, ask God for scriptures to uphold and comfort you during this new journey. Realize that **God is on your side** and he wants to walk beside you as you process your feelings and your loss of previously held dreams for your child.

While the **disclosure of same sex attraction destroys some families**, *it is not necessary*. There can be common ground reached for both parents and teens. As a licensed counselor and licensed minister, **I am available to come along side you and your child during this journey and help**



you find healing. If you or your teen needs a safe place to talk, I would love to be there for your family.



Rachelle's passion is to see people live abundant grace-filled lives with an undercurrent of joy, peace, and purpose. She believes relationships should be authentic and connected. Rachelle helps couples and individuals discover the reasons their relationships are unsatisfying and partners with them on the journey of rediscovering health and hope. Rachelle specializes in couples work including affair recovery, infidelity issues, and sex therapy. With many years of ministry experience as a

preacher's kid, pastor's wife, licensed minister, and missionary, Rachelle has a unique perspective into the struggles of ministry families and has a passion to help them live full satisfying lives while working in the Kingdom.

Her education includes an undergraduate degree in elementary education and a master's degree in professional counseling. Rachelle and her husband have two sons and reside in Nixa, MO.

Resources

[Laumann, E.O., Gagnon, J.H., Michael, R.T, and Michaels, S. \(1994\). The social organization of sexuality: Sexual practices in the United States. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.](#)

[Saltzburg, S. \(2004\). Learning that an adolescent child is gay or lesbian: The parent experience. National Association of Social Workers, 48 \(1\), 109-118.](#)

[Yarhouse, M. \(2010\). Homosexuality and the Christian: A guide for parents, pastors, and friends. Bethany House Publishers. Bloomington: Minnesota.](#)