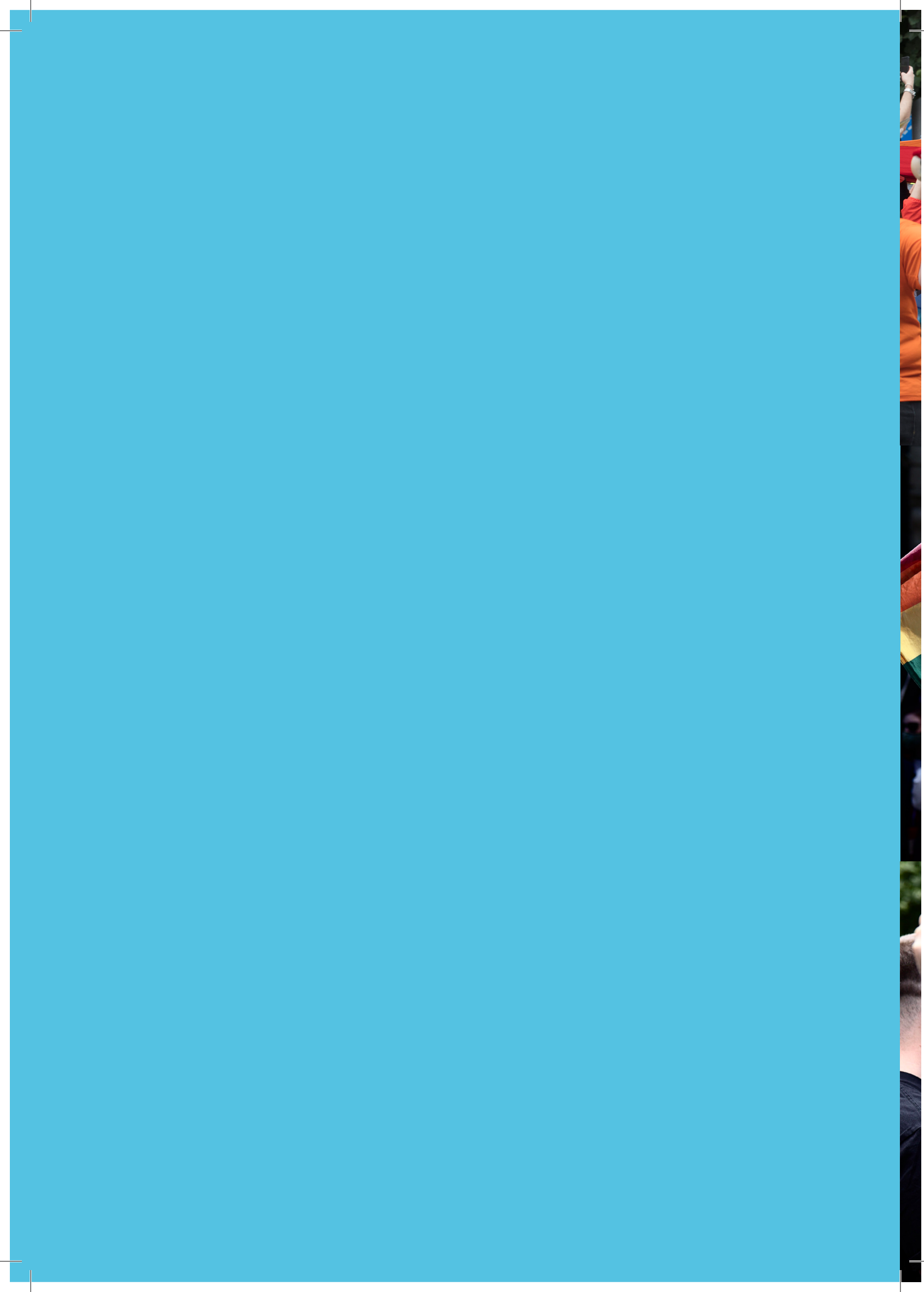




# LGBTQIA+ GUIDE

**FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS**







# INTRODUCTION

This guide has been designed to give parents and guardians the information they need on what it means to be a young LGBTQIA+ person in Ireland today. Many strides have been made when it comes to LGBTQIA+ rights in Ireland, and overall, we have become a welcoming and inclusive country. The Marriage Equality Referendum and the Gender Recognition Act in 2015 hailed a new era for LGBTQIA+ people in Ireland and led to major shifts in how Irish society viewed LGBTQIA+ people - though it wasn't an easy time for LGBTQIA+ people themselves. The topic of being LGBTQIA+ and many people going public with their sexuality and gender identity led to many changes in people's opinions and perspectives. Many people of all ages started to come out around the time before and after the Marriage Equality Referendum. The passing of the referendum has helped many young people come out at younger ages than ever before. This is a fantastic sign: to see young people coming out in their early to mid-teens shows that they feel safe and accepted in this country and their communities. The fact that many teenagers can come out while in school is something many people who grew up in the Ireland of the 2000s and before wouldn't have thought possible. While great change has happened, there are still some who struggle to accept their sexual orientation and gender identity and organisations like ShoutOut work to improve this.

This guide has been designed to give parents and guardians - whether they have LGBTQIA+ children or not - information on terminology and how they can support their LGBTQIA+ young people. This guide provides a rundown on different sexual

orientations, gender identities and other relevant information about some of the issues and struggles LGBTQIA+ people still face. We hope this guide gives parents the knowledge and awareness they need on issues they may not be aware of.

Often when a child comes out to their parents/guardians, even though they are welcomed with love and support, many parents/guardians have worries and anxieties as to what kind of life their child will have. The unknown of what their life will entail can give rise to all sorts of fears and anxieties, many of which are unfounded. This guide aims to dispel some of these myths and to help parents & guardians understand more of what is going on in the life of an LGBTQIA+ young person. We hope this guide leads to many parents and guardians realising that their child will have a healthy normal life, and a life that they can be a part of. You aren't expected to know everything but by doing research, using this guide, and talking to your child, you will be more knowledgeable and understanding of what their life experience can be.



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# SHOUTOUT: WHO WE ARE

We are the island of Ireland's largest provider of LGBTQIA+ workshops to schools, which we have been providing since 2012. Our volunteers travel around the island to tell stories, give participants information and answer questions concerning LGBTQIA+ related issues, and to address issues of bullying and discrimination in schools, youth groups, and workplaces.

We have delivered over 2,249 workshops to around 67,000 secondary school students over the past 10 school years and as such, have heard first-hand the anxieties of young LGBTQIA+ people.

We offer education and clarity to students, youth groups, teachers, social workers, and any other groups that work with young people and will benefit from being informed of LGBTQIA+ terminology and issues.

These interactive workshops help young lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex and asexual (LGBTQIA+) participants realise that 'being different' is a normal part of any culture. Through the workshop we aspire to normalise and celebrate difference and promote equality within their communities.

Our workshops cover a range of issues and are at the forefront of LGBTQIA+ teaching by adapting to recent research and current affairs.

## GET INVOLVED

### 1. Book a workshop for your school:

Visit [www.shoutout.ie/workshops](http://www.shoutout.ie/workshops) to arrange a workshop for students or teachers at your child's school.

### 2. Book a workshop for your workplace:

Visit [www.shoutout.ie/corporate](http://www.shoutout.ie/corporate) to arrange a Parents & Guardians or ABCs of LGBTQIA+ workshop for your workplace or office.

### 3. Volunteer with ShoutOut:

Deliver workshops in schools, lend us your skills, or support our work! Many of our wonderful volunteers are parents & guardians.

Visit [www.shoutout.ie/volunteer](http://www.shoutout.ie/volunteer) to get involved.

### 4. Support our work:

If you found this guide helpful, we'd hugely appreciate any support you could offer at [www.shoutout.ie/donate](http://www.shoutout.ie/donate).



# FOREWORD BY MARY MCALEESE

There is no hiding the fact that even in these increasingly enlightened times parents and guardians experience worry and dread at the thought of their child being LGBTQIA+. More often than not what they fear is a hostile world, the bullies they know are out there, the biased attitudes that can make their child feel anxious, excluded and unhappy. Those attitudes are not all outside the family. Sometimes parents' reactions are part of the problem and it can be difficult for a son or daughter to engage in the reasoned conversations that allow love to avoid damaged relationships. We are a very fortunate generation for we now have the knowledge, the language, the research, the support, the insight, the laws and the freedoms which have transformed our country into a place where our LGBTQIA+ children can live in the light of hope and an authenticity that was denied to so many in the past.

Ours is not yet a perfect world but it is so much better than it was and so much better than many other places. Parents have played a huge role in changing attitudes. In partnership with their children and with the courageous champions of change they have realised the wonderful grace and energy that comes from standing four square with their children, backing them to the hilt, honouring who they are and helping them to be comfortable with who they are.

The truth is all parents worry about their children regardless of whether their children are LGBTQIA+ or not but when we see the high level of bullying and consequent mental health issues which particularly impact our LGBTQIA+ children and young people we are challenged to make that our business, to eliminate it, to confront it, to make the future a place of fully equal citizenship for those we love. Worry is natural but it is not a plan unless it prompts us to the kind of actions and reactions that keep our children safe, make them proud of who they are, make them sure they are loved and valued, support them to be

themselves for that is the best armour anyone can have in this world.

You may have long envisaged a different life for your child. Surrendering that is not easy but it is necessary if you want your child to flourish and not flounder. And talk to parents who have gone through that journey and who know with great certainty that far from being a journey into disappointment it is a journey into joy. But it is a journey into the self that does not have to be made alone. We are legion now the parents who have travelled that road and there are more and more resources to guide and direct our steps to being the best parents we can be to the children we love so deeply and who need to know, to feel they are truly unconditionally loved. Join the journey and watch a child blossom.

Remember the LGBTQIA+ people you know or knew who in past times believed that only half-lives were available to them, who lived lives of desperation and loneliness. How unnecessary it all was and is. How unfair that they were made miserable by the ignorance and prejudices of others that were deeply embedded in our society, deliberately taught, too easily caught. We have this new momentum created by a courageous generation which will accept nothing less than an end to the toxin of prejudice. Keep it going. Stand shoulder to shoulder with our LGBTQIA+ children and let their light transform our lives and our land.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Mary McAleese - she/her - President of Ireland from 1997-2011**

Mary McAleese served as the President of Ireland from 1997-2011. Mary is currently Professor of Children, Law & Religion at University of Glasgow and Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin. She holds a Doctorate and Licentiate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Gregorian University Rome and a Master's Degree in Canon Law from the National University of Ireland (Milltown Institute). Mary's son Justin is gay and Mary has been involved in the LGBTQIA+ rights movement since the 1970s and has been a vocal critic of the Catholic Church's stance on LGBTQIA+ people.

# FOREWORD BY DOMHNAILL HARKIN

The idea for this guide came from my own mother. When I first came out at the age of 23, I didn't know many things about my sexuality, but I was lucky that there was so much information available for me to access, which helped me understand myself and the community I was a part of. Telling my parents terrified me and one day I worked up the courage to tell my mum I was gay. Over the phone, one grey evening in 2017, whilst I went for a walk in Herbert Park in Donnybrook, my mother back home in Donegal didn't expect what I was going to tell her. My mother was initially worried and didn't understand what I was going through. When she then came down to Dublin to see me a few weeks later, she was full of questions, she was worried and concerned about what kind of life I would have and whether I would be happy and safe.

I soon realised that my mother, who has always been loving and supportive, was the next person in my life that I had to assure I would be happy and safe. The first person I had to convince was myself, and that took me many years of torment to accept who I really was. I didn't have to worry about my mother accepting me, but I had to show her that I would be ok and that she didn't have to worry about me. We had many conversations and I told her about the bullying and ostracization I had experienced in school, how for my teen years I felt so alone and afraid. She was very upset that I felt I couldn't tell her what I was going through and I could tell she blamed herself, but she wasn't to blame. I made those decisions to conceal what was happening to me in the belief my parents wouldn't accept me, but that couldn't have been further from the truth. Thankfully things have changed so much since I was a scared teenager in rural Donegal in the late 2000s.

It was my mother who informed me that the local town where I went to school was having its first Pride parade on the 5th of June 2022. I couldn't believe the town where I had experienced such homophobia was having a Pride parade, I wasn't going to go until my mother encouraged me too. I couldn't believe how big the parade was and the amount of people who came out to support it. I marched with the ShoutOut delegation, and my mother marched with us, she commented "I have never been in a march in my life and it's just great". If you had told teenage Domhnaill that one day, he would be openly gay and marching in a Pride parade in his local town with his mother, it's safe to say he would never have believed it.

I hope this guide helps parents and guardians see that if their child is LGBTQIA+ that they will have

a normal and happy life. They are becoming the people they were always meant to be and as the saying goes "*No one ever regretted living a life that was being true to who they were*". So be proud of your child and supportive if they are LGBTQIA+, and if they're not make sure they are accepting of those who are. Of course, many parents/guardians will have worries and concerns about their child being LGBTQIA+, I saw that from my own mother. It's only natural to worry about such things, but thankfully we live in a country today where LGBTQIA+ people can live full and happy lives. I hope this guide will show those parents and guardians that there's nothing to worry about, your children will be happy and fulfilled people, all they need is your love and support.

I want to thank my mother and father for always being supportive and loving of me throughout my journey, I wouldn't be here without them. I also need to mention and thank my best friend Martin McKiernan who helped me navigate the gay world when I first came out. And a thank you to ShoutOut for giving me the support to do this guide and my ShoutOut colleagues, friends and flatmates who helped spell check, design and bring order to the chaotic ideas I often have. And a special thank you to the renowned activists Mary McAleese, Katherine Zappone, Senator David Norris and Lydia Foy who all contributed to this guide.

And to any LGBTQIA+ people out there, young or old, don't be afraid, be who you are and be true to yourself, and people will love you all the more for it.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Domhnaill Harkin - he/him - Creator and Editor of the Guide, Member of the ShoutOut Steering Committee**

Domhnaill has been involved with ShoutOut as a volunteer since 2018, and became a member of the Steering Committee in 2019. Previous projects Domhnaill has created with ShoutOut include the “Know Your Queer History” interview series which can be found online and on our social media profiles. Outside of ShoutOut, Domhnaill is a Social Worker and currently works for the HSE in Dublin. Domhnaill also has a keen interest in international development having volunteered overseas with NGOs EIL Ireland, Suas and the European Voluntary Service (EVS). He is also a board member of the Irish United States Alumni Association (IUSA) having been a member of the 2017 Washington Ireland Program class.



Domhnaill with his parents John and Suzanne Harkin

# FOREWORD BY RUADHÁN Ó CRÍODÁIN

At ShoutOut, we spend a lot of time talking to parents and guardians. In workplaces, in schools, in community groups, we meet those who care for children of all ages, all across the country, and talk about what it means to be young and LGBTQIA+ today. We tell them what we've learned over the past ten years, from the 67,000 school students we've met in classrooms in every county.

Parents are full of questions. We talk to them about terminology, about language, and we watch as they fastidiously take notes on pronouns, fluidity, what it means to be asexual, what it means to be non-binary. They ask us if schools have improved for LGBTQIA+ students. They ask how they can explain to teachers that their child needs support, that their peers need education. They want to know if life is easier for LGBTQIA+ young people now that marriage equality and gender recognition are available. We don't always have easy answers - schools are still tough, homophobic and transphobic bullying still exist, and the LGBTQIA+ community has many battles left to fight.

Many of the parents we speak to are concerned and scared. They want to know if their children will be happy. These parents want to know if they'll have the same bright futures as their peers. Listening to those parents, that one is a little easier to answer. We can hear their love so clearly, speaking about their LGBTQIA+ children. Their voices lift with pride as they explain;

*"Our daughter is trans - it hasn't been easy for her, but she's amazing. We've learned so much from her. I just wish we'd known how to support her sooner."*

*"Our son came out to us a few years ago. He was really nervous. We wish he hadn't been - his boyfriend feels like he's always been a part of our family."*

*"Our child has thrived since they came out at school. Their friends adore them. We feel so lucky to get to see them become themselves at last."*

For an LGBTQIA+ child, having a parent who loves you, who'll stand with you, is like a forcefield. As queer people, we know that not every child has that. We know - sadly - it's still not a given. If you're reading this guide, we hope you know that too. We hope you know that all your child needs is your strength, your protection, and your love, regardless of who they grow up to be. If they're very lucky, they'll have that from you for their whole lives.

There'll still be rocky moments. The world can't always be as warm to LGBTQIA+ people as we'd like. And being a teenager is fun for no one. Your

child might need that extra help with the regular adolescent chaos and drama that comes their way. They might not live a life as smooth as those of their peers. And, I'm sorry to say, that even wonderful LGBTQIA+ teens argue with their parents about the silliest things.

I know for me, as a queer teen, I was so impatient for my life to start. I can't pretend it wasn't lonely, sometimes, feeling like I was the only one. I can't pretend I didn't often wish I was just "normal" when I was younger. I threw myself into every YA book with an LGBTQIA+ storyline, every TV show with a gay character, every artsy queer movie I could get my hands on - just for some company, in the long, lonesome years before I had other LGBTQIA+ friends. It wasn't always fun, and it took me a long time to get to where I am now - to be able to stand proudly, happily, as who I am.

And yet. I wouldn't trade being queer for anything. It's the greatest gift I've ever received, and it's made my life richer in ways I could never have imagined. Our community is one full of love, of laughter, of resilience through the toughest experiences. The friendships I've made through queer people and queer spaces are precious beyond measure. I cannot believe my luck. To be born queer, to become queer, is to be part of a history of brave people choosing to live joyful lives and to share that joy with those we love.

If things are difficult, all that might seem distant now - but that life, this community, those friendships, are waiting for your child too. I hope this guide helps you bring that queer joy a little closer to them. Once they find it, no one will ever be able to take it away from them again.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Ruadhán Ó Críodáin - he/him - Executive Director, ShoutOut**

Ruadhán Ó Críodáin has been involved with ShoutOut since its foundation, first as a volunteer, and then as Development Manager. Now as Executive Director, Ruadhán works to lead and grow the charity and to manage and deliver its LGBTQIA+ awareness programmes in schools, services, and workplaces in service of the charity's mission: LGBTQIA+ inclusion through education. Outside of ShoutOut, Ruadhán serves as a Board Director of GAZE International LGBTQ+ Film Festival.





# ASSUMPTIONS

Before we begin it may be helpful to bring to mind what most people assume a person's life will look like.

Assumptions about people:

- We can tell whether someone is a boy or a girl by looking at their bodies when they are born
- We assume they will act like the gender assigned to them at birth
- We assume they will identify as the gender they were assigned at birth
- We assume their secondary sexual characteristics (changes to their body at puberty) will be aligned with the gender assigned to them at birth (e.g. girls will get periods)
- We assume they will like the opposite gender
- We assume they will like one gender (girls will like boys, boys will like girls)
- We assume their identity will stay the same as they grow up

Being LGBTQIA+ is about deviating in one way or more from these assumptions. This is why we have the concept of “coming out”, because you have to tell people if you differ from assumptions, but you don't have to tell people if you match the assumption (or the norm). These assumptions occur at different points in people's lives, from infancy, through childhood and adolescence, and into adulthood. We call this the life cycle of assumptions. If some of these concepts are new to you, don't worry! We'll explain further later on in this resource.

# SPECTRA

We use a series of spectra to explore some of the identities within the LGBTQIA+ community. The reason for this is to provide a visual and fluid understanding of these identities. For clarity we have also provided a list of definitions. It's important to note that definitions are constantly changing, because we are exploring the way humans live and love, and that is always going to be difficult to fit into a box. These spectra are just a tool to help you understand these identities.

1. Sexuality (your relationship to sex, your level of sexual orientation)
2. Sexual orientation (to whom you are attracted)
3. Gender identity (who you are)
4. Gender expression (how you express yourself through clothes, name, pronoun, mannerisms, and other traits)
5. Biological sex (your body)



# SEXUALITY:



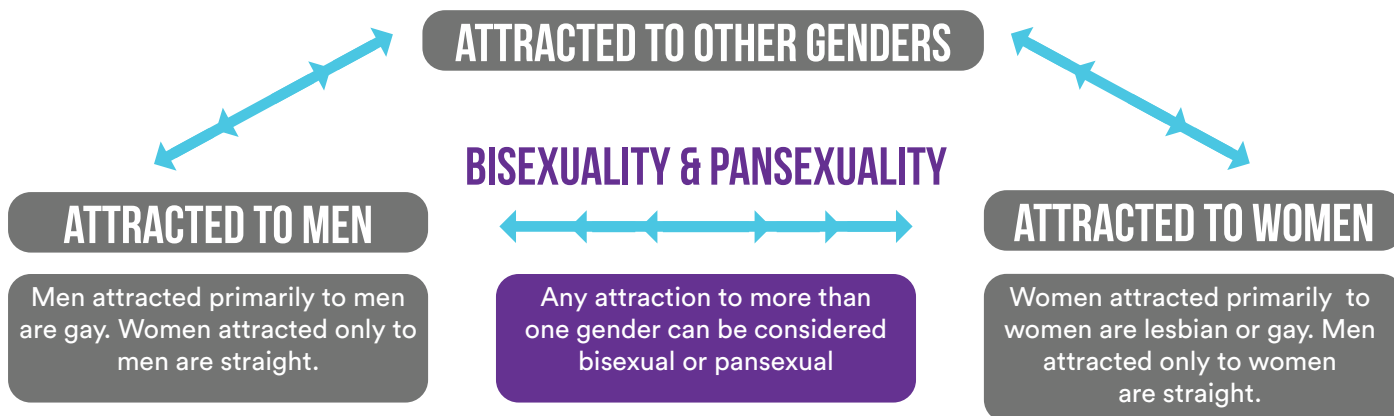
**ACE:** Short for “Asexual”, this describes individuals who experience little to no sexual attraction for others.

- Sexual desires and habits of a person, how and what you desire.
- Desire can ebb and flow over the course of a day, year or lifetime.
- An asexual person is someone who doesn't experience sexual attraction, it is an intrinsic part of the person's identity. Celibacy differs from asexuality as celibacy is a choice, asexuality is a sexual orientation.

**ALLOSEXUAL:** This describes people who do experience sexual attraction for others.

- Asexual people can have a romantic orientation that refers to an individual's pattern of romantic attraction based on a person's gender. Heteroromantic, homoromantic, biromantic etc. A person can be a biromantic asexual and fall in love with people of their own gender and others.
- There are other identities within the asexual umbrella like grey-ace, demisexual, etc.

# SEXUAL ORIENTATION:



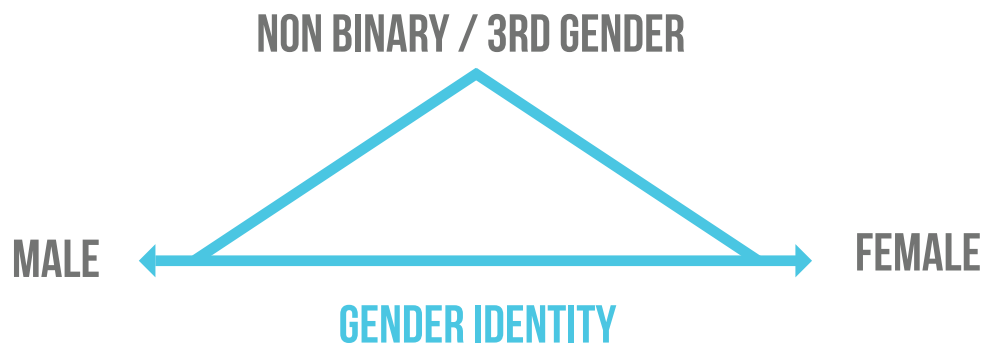
- The kinds of people that you are attracted to; men, women and other genders.
- Sexual orientation is inborn, and one need not have any experience to understand it; just as straight teenagers can know they are straight before engaging in relationships, so too can gay and bi/pan teenagers.
- The concept that a straight teenager can know without experience of relationships, where a gay/bi/pan teenager cannot know without experience is based on the idea that being

anything other than straight is a deviation from the “norm”.

- All of these models reveal that sexual orientation lies on a continuum, not in separate boxes.
- Sexual orientation can flow and change over the course of a person's life.

If you're struggling with the concept of there being other gender identities besides men and women, don't worry! We'll explain this.

# GENDER IDENTITY:



- One's innermost concept of self as male, female, or something outside of those two options - like non-binary, genderfluid, genderqueer, or agender.
- How individuals perceive themselves and describe themselves.
- Everyone has a gender identity.
- One's gender identity can be the same or different from their sex assigned at birth.
- Trans people have gender identities differing from the sex assigned to them at birth (this is when your birth certificate is filled out as either male or female).
- If your gender identity does match the sex you were assigned at birth, you are cisgender.
- Gender fluid/non-binary gender describes any gender identity which does not fit the male and female binary
- Being genderfluid or non-binary, and descriptions of "third genders," is not a new concept - we've seen various examples since written record. In native American culture we can look at "two spirit" people while on the Indian subcontinent "Hijra" identities date back hundreds of years. The internet may have brought the community together in a new way, but gender identities outside the binary have existed for centuries.



# GENDER EXPRESSION:



- The way we show our gender to the world around us through such things as clothing, hairstyles, language, and mannerisms.
- Sometimes gender expression aligns with gender identity in a specific way: women presenting themselves in a feminine way, and men in a masculine way. Gender expression doesn't always align this way, women can be masculine, and men can be feminine (e.g. a man can wear makeup and still be a man).
- Expression isn't always a clue to identity.
- Practically everything is assigned a gender in our culture: i.e. toys, books, clothes and activities.
- There are expectations around gender expression from the moment we are born, from family, culture, media and the wider community.
- People can feel forced into performative gender expression through social conditioning. For example, a young boy may want to do ballet, but stops after people make comments that ballet is "girly".
- We assume people's gender all the time based on how they look, but be respectful if someone tells you otherwise.



# BIOLOGICAL SEX:



- Many people consider biological sex to be binary (that there are two options and nothing in-between). This is an incomplete way to consider sex which varies between people and isn't always binary.
- We're taught that sex is black and white in school, but in reality it is a grey area, it's a complicated and interesting subject.
- The relationship between a person's gender and their body goes beyond one's reproductive functions.
- Biological sex is a collection of characteristics.
- While there are several sex characteristics—such as chromosomes, gonads, external genitals, other reproductive organs, ratio of sex hormones, and secondary sex characteristics — many times these traits do not all align in an expected way.
- Intersex people have variations in sex characteristics (chromosomes, sex hormones, genitals) that do not seem to fit the typical medical definitions of female or male.
- Holding certain physical characteristics as being specifically male or specifically female can have negative impacts in society; for example, women with facial hair can feel ashamed and suffer with low confidence because it's considered "male."
- Many people have binary and essentialist beliefs about biological sex, meaning they think that sex fits into two neat boxes (male or female) and that this then dictates someone's gender identity. We know that sex and gender identity are different and distinct experiences, and that there are variations and fluidity in both.



# IT'S ALL ABOUT LOVE

## A PERSONAL REFLECTION FOR THE PARENT OR GUARDIAN OF A YOUNG PERSON WHO WANTS TO FLOURISH

BY KATHERINE ZAPPONE

I imagine that all young people want to flourish. They want to discover and to create who they are. They desire to have fun, to find meaning, to experience relationships of intimacy. Many want to have a family of their own. Quite simply, our young people yearn for the good life.

As part of this journey, some easily accept the norms of the culture they are born into. Others find that those norms do not fit. Thus begins what still may be a counter-cultural search for the sexual and gender identity (or identities) that feel right for who they are, deep down.

I know that journey. And I was thirty-nine years old before I had the courage to tell my parents that I was lesbian, in love and in a life-partnership with Ann Louise Gilligan. I wrote a 'coming out' letter to them, that was drafted in our Dublin home and sent to Seattle where they lived. The immediate response of my parents, Bob and Kathie, was a telephone call of affirmation, followed promptly by a letter addressed with 'Dear Daughters'.

That simple act of parental love changed my life. It has sat at the bottom of my happiness—and power

to become myself—ever since then.

It was far from easy for them. While my mother held a fierce pride in me as her daughter, she was deeply troubled by my 'difference' and at times appeared to care too much about what others thought. My dad was steeped in the Catholic intellectual tradition, thus he too struggled with my sexual identity.

So little was said for the first thirty-nine years, and then my father wrote the following in response to my letter to them:

'Both Mother and I express our heartfelt support to you and that will never change. You are first and foremost our daughters, and God gave you both to us as a very special gift.'

Those words, written almost thirty years ago, continue to echo in my heart. They represent not only an unconditional acceptance of difference from parent to child, but also the willingness of parents (or guardians) to confront their own discomfort and prejudice. On all counts the world changed for the better.



Katherine and Ann Louise on the day Ireland said yes to marriage equality



Katherine Zappone along with her parents and her late wife Ann Louise Gilligan

I knew I was loved. And accepted. I still do. My parents went one step further though, time and again, to express their unconditional love for me.

They affirmed me, proudly, in public.

The last, of countless times, that they stood by our side, was when they travelled the 4,000+ mile journey from Seattle to Dublin in their eighty-seventh year. Though they had stopped international travel a couple of years earlier, when they knew that we were planning a launch of our memoirs, *Our Lives Out Loud*, my mom finally turned to my father and said, 'let's go.'

Both of them spoke at the launch, shoulder to shoulder with us. In fact, they stole the show with their public words of congratulations to 'our two lovely daughters.' The event prompted Brian Finnegan to write about Bob's speech in his subsequent editorial for GCN. Brian said: 'Listening to Bob Zappone I realized how our families are a powerful force in the

fight for equality.'

Love, love changes everything. Parent to child. Partner to Partner. Spouse to Spouse. And justice, freedom and equality are made manifest.

If you are a parent, or guardian, of a child or young person who wants to flourish, this is the gift that you hold.



## BIOGRAPHY

**Katherine Zappone - she/her - former TD, former Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and Senator.**

Katherine Zappone is a former TD, Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, and Senator. Katherine and her late wife Ann Louise Gilligan took the Irish state to court to have their Vancouver marriage recognised in the Irish state. Their subsequent legal challenges helped pave the way for the successful same-sex marriage referendum in 2015.

# COMING OUT

## ARE YOUNG PEOPLE COMING OUT AS LGBTQIA+ AT EARLIER AGES THAN BEFORE?

The process of coming out for any young LGBTQIA+ person can be a difficult and emotional experience, depending on the person it can take many years for someone to accept their sexuality and gender identity and then feel comfortable to be open about it with family and friends.

Thankfully in Ireland today, we see many young people coming out in their early and mid-teens. This is a positive change, as it shows that many young LGBTQIA+ people today don't have the same level of fear and rejection that LGBTQIA+ people often had in years previously. Factors such as the passing of the Marriage Equality referendum in 2015 and the phenomenon of many public figures being open about their LGBTQIA+ identities has helped create a more open and welcoming environment for people to come out.

Even with these changes, the thought of coming out and not being the presumed heterosexual or cisgender person that society often expects can still cause fear for LGBTQIA+ people of all ages. Countering such fears amongst young people can be done by having open conversations and discussions about sexuality and gender identity. Mentioning people you know and admire who are LGBTQIA+ can show the young person that you are comfortable with LGBTQIA+ identities.

## HOW SHOULD I REACT IF MY CHILD COMES OUT AS LGBTQIA+?

If your child does decide to come out to you and it comes as a shock, it's important to react calmly and be supportive and reassure your child that you love them no matter how they identify. Your child telling you this is a big step for them and isn't an easy one. Try to appreciate how difficult and nerve-wracking this might be for your child and pause before responding with how you feel about it, or what you think. Listen to your child and reassure them that you love them no matter what. It's normal to have questions, but don't bombard them with these when they first come out to you - they just need reassurance. Those questions can come later, if your child is comfortable. It's important to remember they may not have answers, especially if they have only come to accepting their sexual orientation or gender identity recently. Doing your own research

and using this guide could give you the information you may need.

Often parents may feel guilty that they didn't know sooner or that they didn't create a welcoming environment for the child to come out, especially if they are older when they come out. Despite the best of intentions, it's natural to have these concerns and regrets. It doesn't mean you can't move forward. If your child does feel that you were insensitive, or said hurtful things, it's important to acknowledge this and apologise. This can then lead to you both developing a closer and stronger bond going forward. It's important to be patient with your child and offer them all the support and love that they need. For example, if your child comes out as trans or non-binary and wishes to pursue various stages of transition this can be a very long and difficult road and they will need your full support. You don't have to understand everything your child is going through but by being open, listening and supporting them, you can be the pillar they need.

## HOW CAN I CREATE A SPACE WHERE MY CHILD WOULD FEEL COMFORTABLE COMING OUT AS LGBTQIA+?

Coming out is different for everyone. Someone may only realise later in life that they are LGBTQIA+, not everyone knows from a young age. Someone can come from a very LGBTQIA+ friendly home and maybe have family members and friends who are LGBTQIA+ and they may still find it hard to come out. It is different for everyone and all you can do as a parent is to ensure you create an environment from an early age that shows your child, whatever their sexuality or gender identity, they are loved and supported. Something as simple as putting up Pride flags during Pride month every year can show your child you are supportive. Being mindful of calling out anti LGBTQIA+ language or rhetoric is also another great way of showing you won't tolerate those harmful attitudes/views. Speaking positively about LGBTQIA+ people in the media, in your own life, and in your community, demonstrates a supportive approach to LGBTQIA+ identities. Bringing LGBTQIA+ inclusive media into the home shows your child that you are interested in the lives and stories of LGBTQIA+ people. By creating a positive, inclusive and LGBTQIA+ environment within your home and in conversations you have with or around your child can lay the foundations for your child to come to you in trust and come out to you.

Schools can also show that their environment is warm and receptive by having events around LGBTQIA+ awareness days with events and speakers. Organisations such as ShoutOut coming into schools/youth centres reinforces that the place is open and welcoming to LGBTQIA+ people.

## STATISTICS ON COMING OUT

Irish research (Higgins et al 2016, the LGBT Ireland report) shows that the time between when a young person realises that they are LGBTQIA+ (on average 12-years-old) and when they 'come out' to others (on average 16-years-old) can be a period of stress and mental health risk.

The years between knowing you are LGBTQIA+ and coming out are known as the isolation years. This is because young people can feel very isolated when they are keeping a part of who they are secret.

### WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE NOT COME OUT SOONER?

Young people often don't come out straight away because they are afraid of how their families and friends will react, according to recent studies which showed that 80% of LGBTQIA+ young people reported "fear of rejection" as one of the reasons for delaying coming out.

They may have heard the people in their lives say negative things about LGBTQIA+ people, or use homophobic language (e.g. saying something is gay to mean it's bad, or using slurs like faggot.)

While things are slowly improving, it can still be difficult to be LGBTQIA+ as a young person in Ireland today.

We surveyed the students who received ShoutOut workshops:

- Just 15% described their school as an open environment for LGBTQIA+ students to be themselves
- 65% said their teachers never speak about, or only ever speak negatively, about LGBTQIA+ identities

### WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN HOMOPHOBIA, BIPHOBIA, TRANSPHOBIA, INTERPHOBIA AND ACEPHOBIA?

There are a lot of words to describe the discrimination faced by the LGBTQIA+ community. While most people think just of homophobia, other words can describe a specific type of discrimination faced by a group within the LGBTQIA+ community. For example, a person might say they are fine with gay people but think bisexuals are "greedy", in this instance they are being biphobic but not necessarily homophobic.

Similarly, the trans, intersex and asexual community all face specific forms of discrimination. Most initiative's movements focus mainly on homophobia and transphobia, therefore much of the research and policy is based on these two forms of discrimination, but it is worth remembering that there are other terms as well.

### WHAT IS HOMOPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC BULLYING?

Bullying is defined by the Department of Education and Science as "...repeated aggression, verbal, psychological or physical, conducted by an individual or a group against others." When this type of behaviour arises out of the fact that the victim is identified or identifies themselves as LGBTQIA+, or if the language used in the bullying is such that it would be offensive to LGBTQIA+ people, then the behaviour can be described as homophobic and/or transphobic bullying (Norman, 2010).

# BULLYING DUE TO SOMEONE'S SEXUAL ORIENTATION OR GENDER IDENTITY

A young person being bullied at school, work, a youth centre or online due to their sexuality or gender identity, or their perceived identity, is unfortunately something that still does happen in Ireland today. Thankfully, cases of this are becoming rarer and most schools and places young people hang out in have a zero tolerance policy to any sort of anti-LGBTQIA+ behaviours. However, it still does happen and it is an issue that many young LGBTQIA+ have had to deal with or are still dealing with.

The 2019 *BelongTo School Climate Survey* showed some startling statistics. Some of the key findings included:

- 73% of LGBTQIA+ students feel unsafe at school
- 77% of LGBTQIA+ students are verbally harassed based on their sexual orientation, gender, gender expression or ethnic origin
- 1 in 3 LGBTQIA+ students reported that other students are not accepting of LGBTQIA+ identities
- 68% of LGBTQIA+ students hear homophobic remarks from other students.

This shows that for many openly LGBTQIA+ young people in schools, they are still the target of bullying and discrimination.

It is of vital importance that schools and other youth-centered organisations have zero tolerance to any sort of LGBTQIA+ bullying or discrimination. They can do this by ensuring students have clear and safe pathways to report homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying to school staff, and by ensuring those staff are adequately trained and prepared to combat bullying and discrimination.

As a parent or guardian you can also play a role in ensuring your child isn't being bullied or discriminated against for any reason by having open conversations around what bullying or discrimination may look like, and telling them that if it ever happens to them that they can come to you, and you will go to the school and make sure it stops. If your child is openly LGBTQIA+ you can have a more frank and honest conversation with them and tell them you will always be there to help and that if any such issue arises whether in their school, youth club, drop-in centre etc that you will become involved and ensure it stops.

There is a further point to be made about the responsibilities of parents and guardians in this respect, as a primary caregiver it is also your responsibility to do everything you can to ensure that your child is not a bully. In the case of homophobic/transphobic bullying, this starts with a home environment that is tolerant of diversity and does not accept nor encourage such prejudices through use of homophobic language and making it clear it is in no way acceptable to you nor a desirable or attractive characteristic. We can all be more careless with our use of language from time to time than we would like to admit, but the onus remains with each of us to mitigate this.

It can be particularly tricky if your child is being targeted by homophobic or transphobic bullying and they have not come out but some of their peers have presumed that they are LGBTQIA+. This can be damaging for any young person, whether they are LGBTQIA+ or not.

If you have a feeling your child could be LGBTQIA+ and is having a difficult time at school, contact the school and ask them for updates and for them to keep an eye on your child. Ensure that their anti-bullying policy is being actioned, and that it is inclusive of LGBTQIA+ students. Ensure that they have access to their friends and peer support networks.



# ADVICE FOR PARENTS & GUARDIANS

BY LYDIA FOY

I would say to the parents and guardians of LGBTQIA+ young people, especially the parents/guardians of trans young people, firstly don't panic if your child is LGBTQIA+ or trans. There is nothing wrong with it, it's not the end of the world. Ireland didn't dissolve after the marriage equality referendum passed in 2015. Be proud of your child for having the courage to come out and tell you this very personal aspect of their life.

If your child is transgender, it's important to listen and support them, it isn't easy being trans and of course it's natural for a parent or guardian to be worried about their child being transgender. It is a long road especially if your child wants to physically transition at some stage; whilst this may feel overwhelming, shying away from the child and ignoring what they are saying will only make things worse. The younger a transgender person is helped and supported the easier it will be for them to transition. Another thing to do is to get advice and support from support groups, medical professionals, and more. There are now many support groups for young trans people - and for the parents/guardians of trans people. TENI have great support groups and you can speak with staff who work directly with similar cases and meet with other parents/guardians of trans people. It's also vital to let your child meet supportive medical professionals who understand trans issues. Also, mental health support in the form of counselling or therapy is also very important for young trans people and it's a great idea to link your child up with a counsellor/therapist who specializes in gender transition.

Don't be afraid to speak directly to your child as well and have open conversations with them about

what they are going through, it will help you both support each other and understand each other better. Encouraging your child to socialise with other LGBTQIA+ young people through various youth groups which are all over the country is another positive step, meeting people like them will greatly help them with their own confidence and self-acceptance. There are now so many ways that young trans people can live happy and fulfilled lives, with the passing of the Gender Recognition Act it is now so much easier to transition smoothly both officially and personally. I would tell any parent of a trans child: love and support them, they are becoming the person they were born to be. It may be different from the person you thought they would become, but they are becoming the person they are meant to be. Be there for them, listen to them, support them, love them and they will give you the same back.



Lydia Foy and Joe Biden



## BIOGRAPHY

**Dr Lydia Foy - she/her - Transgender Rights Activist**

In March 1993, Dr Lydia Foy applied to the office of the Registrar General for a new birth certificate to reflect her gender, but she was refused. This was to be the beginning of her fight to be recognised as a woman by the Irish state. After many legal challenges and a ruling that found that Irish law was incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights due to the fact there was no legislation on gender identity in the state, in 2015 the Gender Recognition Act was passed, and Lydia became the first person to be recognised under the act as the gender she is.

# WHAT LGBTQIA+ KIDS WISH THEIR PARENTS/GUARDIANS KNEW

Over the years ShoutOut has worked with and met many young people who are openly LGBTQIA+ and they are confident and proud of who they are. In most cases their parents/guardians are accepting but sometimes there are things they wish their parents either knew or understood about them. Here are some of the things we have found through our work that LGBTQIA+ kids wish their parents knew:

## THEY WISH THEIR PARENTS KNEW IT WAS MORE THAN JUST “GAY”.

There are many different orientations and identities and while gay identities have increasing visibility in media, there are so many other letters in the LGBTQIA+ acronym! It's important for parents to know this and by familiarising oneself with the acronym which we have broken down at the start of the guide, learning the terms, gaining fluency, and paying attention to the range of terms and language LGBTQIA+ young people use to capture their identities.

## THEY WISH THEIR PARENTS KNEW THAT THE BINARY IS OVER.

The binary is the idea that there are only two options when it comes to categories like:

**Gender:** men and women

**Sexual Orientation:** gay and straight

We know this not to be true and that it has never been the case, for example:

**Gender:** non-binary people, gender fluid people, agender people

**Sexual Orientation:** bisexual and pansexual people

Even in the case of sex characteristics, these can't be easily sorted into a binary. Many people are intersex, with sex characteristics which don't fit neatly into a male/female binary.

The idea that someone must be one or the other is totally wrong, there are many identities that are along a spectrum and its important parents and guardians are aware of this.

## THEY WISH THEIR PARENTS KNEW THAT “GETTING IT” STRAIGHT AWAY IS NOT THE MOST IMPORTANT THING.

While it is understandable that parents/guardians may at times find certain things confusing when it comes to what being LGBTQIA+ is, it's more about taking your lead from your child and listening to them. Your child may identify with a label like lesbian but find they lie somewhere on a spectrum within that label, and experience fluidity. That might challenge your understanding of the term. That's ok! People have complex lives and experiences, especially when it comes to parts of our identity like our sexual orientation or gender. Young people will use a range of terms to describe their identity. Some of them may be new to you. LGBTQIA+ people understand their own identities. It's important not to challenge, or push, a young person on their own definition too much, as they may feel quite strongly about a particular label.

## THEY WISH PARENTS KNEW THAT QUEER IS NOT ALWAYS A BAD WORD.

The word Queer was used as an insult and derogatory word for many years against LGBTQIA+ people, but in recent years it has been reclaimed by the community to be used as a word they use to describe themselves. For example, Queer can now be used as an umbrella term when talking about something LGBTQIA+. You could say the Queer community, Queer Studies, or Queer film. By the LGBTQIA+ community taking back the word Queer, the power it has as an insult is lost as its used as a word to describe many aspects of the LGBTQIA+ community in a positive way. Some people are still sensitive to the term, and that's ok too. The best thing to do is to follow someone's lead in terms of how they describe themselves, and to be respectful.

These are just some examples of things LGBTQIA+ kids wish their parents knew. There are many more and if you have an LGBTQIA+ child don't be afraid to ask them if there are things they wish you knew. It might be hard to hear but it's showing them that you care and are there to support and love them.

# TALKING TO YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT LGBTQIA+ IDENTITIES

As part of creating an inclusive home, it's worth talking to young people of all ages about LGBTQIA+ identities - to help them know they'll be supported if they come out, but also so that they can grow up to be young allies if they don't identify as LGBTQIA+ themselves.

Here are some pointers for talking about LGBTQIA+ identities, particularly with younger children. It's important to be proactive, to lead on these conversations, and to look for teachable moments in the world and their school. Share your own experiences, and those of your family and loved ones, but ask them questions to get a sense of how they feel, and their opinion.

- All families look different. Some families have a mum and a dad, some have two mums, some have two dads, some have one mum or one dad, or parents of other genders.
- Sometimes a boy falls in love with a girl, sometimes a girl with a girl, a boy with a boy, or with any other gender besides. You can love whoever feels right for you, once they're kind to you.
- It can be very hard to feel "different". They might feel different from their friends and classmates in some ways. Sometimes people who feel, or seem different from others, can be treated unkindly. This often happens to people who are LGBTQIA+. We should be extra kind to people who are treated unfairly for being different.
- Everyone's gender is unique to them. How you see yourself and how you want to express your gender is personal - there is not just one way to be.
- Things, like toys and clothes, don't have genders - people have genders. Our ideas of this change all the time.
- You can't tell a person's gender just by looking at them - and you shouldn't try to guess.
- Your body doesn't determine your gender.



# HOW TO BE A SUPPORTIVE PARENT/GUARDIAN TO YOUR LGBTQIA+ CHILD

## 1. KNOW YOUR STUFF

Whether your child is LGBTQIA+ or not, it would be great to do some reading on the issues, so you are prepared to support them in their future.

If your child has come out you may need to research what this means, know the definitions involved, and potentially renew or adjust your “birds and bees” talk. See the resources section should you need advice with this.

## 2. TALK TO THE CHILD ABOUT WHAT THIS MEANS FOR THEM

Every cisgender and straight person is different, similarly every LGBTQIA+ person is different. Make sure the child who has come out knows you are available to have open and honest conversations with them. In the same way that we don't believe being straight wholly defines a person, being lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex or asexual doesn't solely define a person. It's an important part of who they are, but it's not all that this child is.

## 3. CREATE AN OPEN ENVIRONMENT

It will be difficult for your child to feel comfortable in their home if people in the house use language which is homophobic or transphobic, for example using terms like “that's so gay” or derogatory terms aimed at LGBTQIA+ people. Discourage that type of language among the people who live in the house. It's also worth altering your own language to be inclusive of the possibility or actuality of your child being LGBTQIA+, for example not assuming they will have a girlfriend if they are male and vice versa. Speak positively about LGBTQIA+ role models and incorporate TV shows/books with LGBTQIA+ characters into the home.

## 4. FIND OUT ABOUT LOCAL RESOURCES

If you are a parent, you are not alone.

Thousands and thousands of parents have had their children come out as LGBTQIA+ and many of them will have struggled about what this means for their child. There are support groups and organisations all over the island of Ireland; find out where your local one is.

## 5. MAKE TIME FOR YOURSELF

You have imagined a life for your child, which is probably different now that they have come out. This will take some adjusting to. If you are having a hard time with this, it is important you seek advice and help, and it may not be appropriate to involve your child in this. Your child has their journey, and now you may have yours, so it's very important not to neglect your own personal development in this new reality.



# BUILDING INCLUSIVE HOMES

As we have discussed in previous sections of the guide there are many ways parents and guardians can build an inclusive home for their children whilst they are growing up. This can and should be done regardless if your children are LGBTQIA+ or not. If none of your children are LGBTQIA+ then they will very likely grow up to be open and welcoming to people regardless of their sexuality or gender identity, if you create an inclusive home having an environment where different sexualities and gender identities are spoken about openly and positively will help children grow up with an understanding and awareness of what being LGBTQIA+ means. There are many other ways you can build a positive and inclusive environment in your home:

- Get up to speed with the terminology and issues facing young LGBTQIA+ people and speak positively and openly about LGBTQIA+ people and public figures in your home.
- You also need to be open with the young person and be willing to answer questions regarding LGBTQIA+ sexualities and gender identities. Of course, always keeping this age appropriate. For example, if your child asks what being gay means, explain what it is and make sure you reinforce that its perfectly normal to be gay.
- Letting your children watch and read age-appropriate LGBTQIA+ books and films is a brilliant way to implicitly build a more inclusive home. There is a whole range of tv, film and literature which has age-appropriate

LGBTQIA+ stories and including this with the mainstream heterosexual stories is a great step in normalising differing identities with your children from an early age. (You'll find some recommendations in the "LGBTQIA+ Inclusive Films & TV" list in this guide.)

There are so many ways an inclusive home environment can be built. Doing so will lead to young people growing up understanding what being LGBTQIA+ is and knowing that if they are LGBTQIA+ themselves they will be welcomed with open arms by their parents or guardians.



# EQUALITY FOR CHILDREN

## LEGISLATING FOR LGBTQIA+ FAMILIES IN IRELAND

BY LISA NIC AN BHREITHIMH AND AOIFE LEAHY

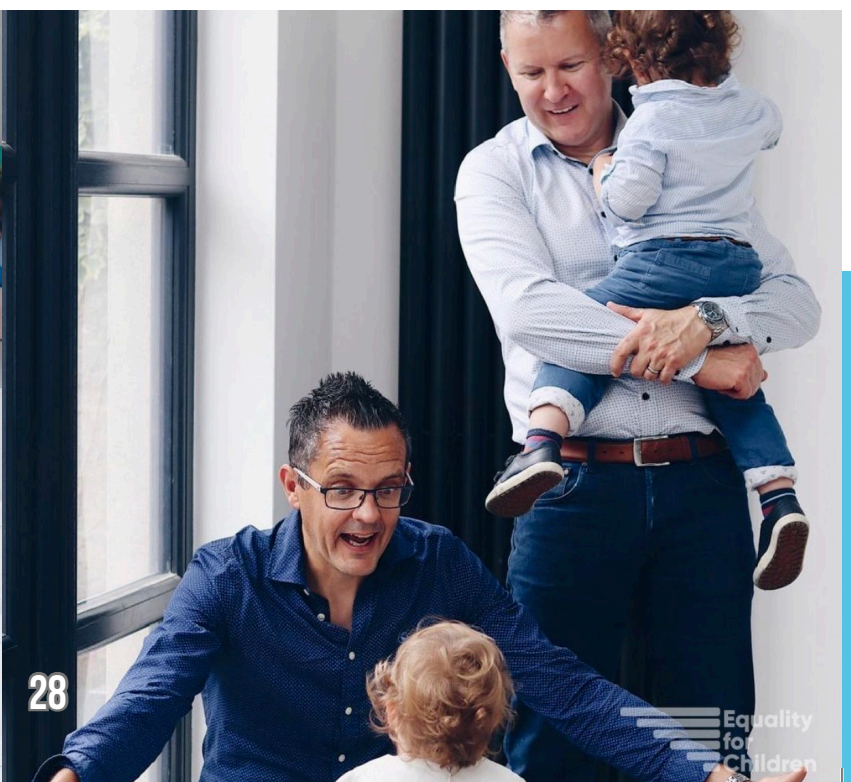
Equality for Children ([www.equalityforchildren.ie](http://www.equalityforchildren.ie)) is an Irish volunteer-led campaign group which was formed in 2019 when a group of LGBTQIA+ parents came together to fight for equality for their children. Our main aim is to ensure that our children and young people have a legal relationship with both of their parents and equality with children in non-LGBTQIA+ families. The majority of our volunteers and members are LGBTQIA+ parents or prospective parents, supported by committed allies. Some of us have babies and toddlers, while others are now parents of teenagers. Members of Equality for Children regularly testify before the Oireachtas, to raise awareness of the urgent need for legislative reform. Recent contributions can be watched back on Oireachtas TV.

Since the Marriage Equality Referendum of 2015, same-sex couples can marry in Ireland and many believe that marriage gives automatic legal rights to both parents. However, this is not the case for same-sex couples who need to use assisted human reproduction to have their children. Most of the LGBTQIA+ families that currently have full legal recognition only obtained their rights under the Children and Family Relationships Act of 2015 when it was fully enacted in 2020. Other families in the Equality for Children network are still seeking legal recognition which is dependent on bills that may or

may not pass in the future. There are many families still waiting. Home insemination (done outside a clinic) isn't covered, nor is surrogacy, for example. Even children of LGBTQIA+ people born outside Ireland are excluded. For families that have their children using these methods, just one parent has full legal rights and the other parent can only apply for guardianship.

Equality for Children member, Aoife, offers an example of the challenges faced by LGBTQIA+ families in Ireland today, "My wife gave birth in 2009. At the time we weren't considered a family under the law, although Clodagh and I had planned our baby together. We married in 2016 but it was only in 2020 that I was able to get a retrospective declaration of parentage from our local district court under the Children and Family Relationships Act (CFRA). Our child was 11 by then and chatted very confidently to the judge about our family. We are both named on the re-registered birth certificate now, with Clodagh as mother and me as parent."

In Equality for Children, we recommend that LGBTQIA+ people commencing their journey to parenthood check if they will be eligible for legal recognition. If conceiving in 2022, female LGBTQIA+ couples are required to use an Irish clinic, use a sperm donor who is traceable by register and to give



birth in Ireland in order for them to fall under the CFRA and for both parents to be recognised under Irish law. Many couples feel upset that their choices are so narrow if both parents' names are to go on the birth certificate.

The situation is more challenging for male couples who have their children through surrogacy. Domestic surrogacy in Ireland is mentioned in the current draft of the Assisted Human Reproduction Bill, but this bill excludes many families and is still being revised. International surrogacy is excluded from the current draft. Until the law changes, only the biological father of the baby can be named on the birth certificate, while the surrogate is named as the mother. The second dad can apply for guardianship when the child is two years old but cannot become a fully recognised parent at the present date.

Outside of assisted human reproduction, same sex couples and single applicants can avail of intercountry adoption via the US. The US is currently the only country open to same sex male couples adopting from Ireland. Both adoptive parents are recognised as the legal parents of the adopted child once an adoption order has been granted. Applicants are also now entitled to adoptive leave benefit following recent changes to resolve a lacuna in Irish law to allow men who identify as gay/bisexual to utilise the benefit. Those seeking further information on intercountry adoption can contact Séamus Kearney Martone of Irish Gay Dads at [irishgaydads@gmail.com](mailto:irishgaydads@gmail.com).

Ranae von Meding, CEO of Equality for Children says, "This Pride month as we celebrate how far we have come, it's important to remember the work that needs to be done to ensure true equality for all LGBTQIA+ people and their families in Ireland. Until the most vulnerable of all are protected, our children, we cannot say we live in an equal Ireland."



*Much work remains to be done to achieve true equality for LGBTQIA+ families in Ireland. Equality for Children endeavours to continue our work until all LGBTQIA+ families are recognised in full by Irish law. Visit [www.equalityforchildren.ie](http://www.equalityforchildren.ie) for more information or to support the campaign for equality for LGBTQIA+ families, or if you require support for your own family, reach out to Equality for Children or FLAC (Free Legal Advice Centres) at [lgbtqi@flac.ie](mailto:lgbtqi@flac.ie) who can provide guidance and advice on rights and legislation for LGBTQIA+ families.*



**AOIFE LEAHY**

Equality for Children Member



**LISA NIC AN  
BHREITHIMH**

Equality for Children Member and Steering Committee Member for ShoutOut

# RELIGIONS AND THEIR ATTITUDES TO LGBTQIA+ PEOPLE

BY MARY MCALEESE

Many parents and guardians who are religious, whether they are Catholics or of other religious affiliations may struggle to accept their children's sexuality or gender identity due to the teachings of their faith. Their views are understandable given that, for centuries, religious teachings in virtually every major faith tradition have influenced laws, practices and attitudes that have been hostile to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex. However their views are also plain wrong and downright dangerous. God has been weaponised to make LGBTQIA+ lives miserable, to make them feel excluded and unloved even by the very God who created them. The pain and offense caused by those skewed, dysfunctional teachings, as well as their scientific invalidity is being confronted more and more in country after country throughout the world by those of us who believe in a loving God who is badly served by those who fail to honour the equality and the dignity of all God's creation.

History was made in Ireland when the overwhelming majority of voters voted in favour of same-sex marriage in 2015. In so doing they not only ignored but challenged the stated views of a majority of their church leaders. They unleashed a tsunami of grace into civic society and showcased what God's love truly means.

History was made again in 2020 when senior faith leaders, academics and lay faith leaders from every faith tradition and every continent gathered at Westminster Abbey to promulgate a joint Declaration on the sanctity of life and the dignity of all. Here are its most important paragraphs:

*"We recognize with sadness that certain religious teachings have often, throughout the ages, caused and continue to cause deep pain and offense to those who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex.*

*We acknowledge, with profound regret, that some of our teachings have created, and continue to create, oppressive systems that fuel intolerance, perpetuate injustice and result in violence. This has led, and continues to lead, to the rejection and alienation of many by their families, their religious groups and cultural communities.*

*We ask for forgiveness from those whose lives have been damaged and destroyed on the pretext of religious teaching. We believe that love and compassion should be the basis of faith and that hatred can have no place in religion.....*



*We call for all attempts to change, suppress or erase a person's sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression – commonly known as “conversion therapy” – to end, and for these harmful practices to be banned.*

*Finally, we call for an end to the perpetuation of prejudice and stigma and commit to work together to celebrate inclusivity and the extraordinary gift of our diversity.”*

Do you want to be part of a system that loves and accepts and supports your child or one which damages your child by forcing him, or her, or them, to conform to discredited religious teachings? We know from studies on the mental health of LGBTQIA+ young people that they are three times more likely to suffer from mental health issues compared to heterosexual young people. We know from studies on conversion therapies carried out within faith systems often under the guise of spiritual counselling of the serious damage done to LGBTQIA+ children and young people. More and more jurisdictions are now outlawing these practices because they are seen for what they are, forms of child abuse designed to flatter and sustain flawed religious teachings with no regard for the well-being of the child or young person.

In March 2021, the Catholic Church's Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith published a document approved by Pope Francis, which said that Catholic married same-sex couples are not capable of receiving or expressing God's grace and thus cannot receive a Church blessing. The document was received with indignation and opposition from many clergy and laity including bishops. The feedback already available from the current synodal process underway throughout the universal Catholic Church shows that the People of God are no longer persuaded by Church teaching on homosexuality and a few other things besides. Nothing is surer than

that they will go the same way into obsolescence as many other Church teachings have gone over the decades though they are still capable of causing a lot of damage until then. Change is coming and the primacy of love is growing in every heart, home and community where parents open their arms in a warm embrace to confidently accept their child's sexuality or gender identity, to accept them as God made them, to show them what love truly means and how wonderful it is, how powerful and transformative it can be. Where there is doubt let us bring faith. Where there is hatred let us sow love. (From the Prayer of St Francis of Assisi.)



## BIOGRAPHY

**Mary McAleese - she/her - President of Ireland from 1997-2011**

Mary McAleese served as the President of Ireland from 1997-2011. Mary is currently Professor of Children, Law & Religion at University of Glasgow and Chancellor of Trinity College Dublin. She holds a Doctorate and Licentiate in Canon Law from the Pontifical Gregorian University Rome and a Master's Degree in Canon Law from the National University of Ireland (Milltown Institute). Mary's son Justin is gay and Mary has been involved in the LGBTQIA+ rights movement since the 1970s and has been a vocal critic of the Catholic Church's stance on LGBTQIA+ people.

# TENI (TRANS EQUALITY NETWORK IRELAND)

## FAMILY SUPPORT

BY HANNAH SOLLEY, TENI'S FAMILY SUPPORT AND EDUCATION OFFICER

TENI is a non-profit, member-driven organisation founded in 2006. Originally as a volunteer organisation and then registered as a company limited by guarantee in 2010. The governance is provided by a volunteer Board and operations are led by the Chief Executive and staff.

Our vision is a world where all people, regardless of gender identity or expression, enjoy full acceptance, equality and human rights. Our mission is to advance the rights and equality, and improve the lives of trans people and their families.

One of the areas of our work is supporting families and young people. Our Family Support and Education Officer works closely with parents, family members and young people to make sure that they are linked in with support groups and other people in our community. We strive to create a community network for all families of trans individuals in Ireland so that they can build a sense of belonging and feel less isolated in this new family journey. TENI believes in creating spaces for whole family units to engage in support. We offer families one to one support and guidance either in person or via zoom depending on the location. We also have a wide variety of support groups.

**TransParenCI** is our parent and adult family member support group. It is open to parents, aunts, uncles, grandparents etc. The group meets once a month in person in Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Kerry. The group also meets online via zoom once a month. This group is facilitated by parents of trans people so there is a knowledge and understanding of the challenges and emotions that parents can experience.

**Transformers** is our young person's support group for ages 13-18 (secondary school age). This group meets once a month in Dublin, Cork, Waterford and Kerry. The group also meets once a month online via zoom. This group is facilitated by a qualified therapist. We feel that this is important in order to create a sense of safety and openness to sharing within the group.

**TransParenCI and Transformers** are a set of support groups. These groups meet at the same time in the same venue but separate spaces for privacy. This way, both parents and young people are getting

support whilst also supporting each other. A parent must be attending the TransParenCI group in order for a young person to attend the Transformers group.

**TransParenCI Minis** is a support group specifically for parents of 12 and under. Often the needs of families of younger children are different to those of teens. This group aims to support these families in a way that is not overwhelming, and looks at age appropriate responses to situations that may arise. This group meets once a month online via zoom.

**Transcend** is a support group for young adults in the age bracket of 18-24yrs. Often young adults do not feel ready to join an adult peer support group initially. This group aims to bridge the gap between the adolescent services and the adult services. This group meets online via zoom every 6 weeks.

**Transgender Family Support Line** is a listening and signposting service for family members of trans people. It runs on a Sunday evening from 6-9pm and a Tuesday morning from 10am-12pm. It is run by volunteers who are all parents of trans people. It is a great service for parents who want to talk to other parents and who might not be ready to reach out to TENI or join a support group yet. Contact the line on 01 907 3707.

Our motto is 'Families supporting Families'. This is intrinsic to all of the work that TENI does with families in our community.

TENI also works closely with schools and organisations that work directly with young people to offer advice, guidance and ongoing support. We offer trans awareness trainings to staff of primary and secondary schools, youth organisations, healthcare professionals, mental health professionals, residential units, foster care agencies etc. Any adults who work with young people can request a TENI training. Our doors are always open and we welcome anyone who needs advice or information in this area.

If you need to get in touch with us for any reason you can reach us at [office@teni.ie](mailto:office@teni.ie) or 01 873 3575.

Our family support and education officer is Hannah Solley and she can be reached at [hannah@teni.ie](mailto:hannah@teni.ie).

# RELATIONSHIPS

As is the case with any young people, LGBTQIA+ young people will be interested in dating and having relationships. Dating and liking someone in teenage years and continuing into adult years is an exciting and scary time. There will be joy, there will be awkward dates, there will be heartbreak; as the saying goes “The course of true love never did run smooth”.

Sometimes parents may think there are major differences between heterosexual relationships and LGBTQIA+ ones. In reality, many young people share similar experiences in their early relationships regardless of their sexuality or gender identity. Young people want to meet someone, they want to fall in love, they want to explore their sexuality.

As a parent all you can be is supportive and caring to your child. Be there to give advice if they ask where they should go on their first date, what they should text back, or be their shoulder to cry on if they are heartbroken. You might think you don't know what to say to your child when they ask advice about their LGBTQIA+ relationship but it's just the same as any other. All they want from you and all they need, is your love, support and understanding.

# SEXUAL HEALTH & CONSENT

Many parents will be concerned about their child's sexual health and whether they are being safe or not. It's important to not panic and worry your child about such issues if they are LGBTQIA+. You may have fears around STIs such as HIV based on your understanding of the virus. It's important to understand the facts and resources available to young LGBTQIA+ people seeking to look after their sexual health. Treatment for, and prevention of, STIs such as HIV have changed substantially in recent years. People living with HIV today, on effective medication, can no longer pass on the virus. Their viral load becomes undetectable, making the virus untransmittable (U=U). HIV is also more easily preventable through medication developments such as PrEP and PEP.

LGBTQIA+ young people, just like all young people, need the tools and knowledge to keep themselves safe in their first relationships. Ensure your child understands the dynamics of consent - how to express consent, how to receive consent, and how to respect consent from others. Talk to your child about dating apps, and help them to understand that these should be used by adults only. Make sure your child knows that if they are concerned, or nervous, or have a bad feeling about an encounter or an individual, that they know they can come to you for advice and to be kept safe.

It's important that you take some time to research LGBTQIA+ sexual health and consent practices and try to sensitively pass this information on to your child, as they may not be receiving this education

in school. Make your child aware that you are there to answer any questions and support without judgement, offer to take them to their GP if they need, and ensure they have access to condoms and other safe sex materials.

For safe sex resources, visit [sexualwellbeing.ie](http://sexualwellbeing.ie), [lgbt.ie](http://lgbt.ie), [HIV Ireland](http://HIV Ireland), or [MPOWER](http://MPOWER).



# LGBTQIA+ INCLUSIVE FILMS & TV

We can't overstate how meaningful cultural representation is for young LGBTQIA+ folks. Check these out, and have a browse through LGBTQIA+ sections on sites like Netflix and Volta for even more.

**(PG)**

## KAPAEMAHU (YOUTUBE)

A short animated film exploring the history of Mahu in Native Hawaiian and Tahitian cultures - dual male and female spirits who brought their healing and caring powers to Hawaii. Find it on YouTube for a better understanding of third genders in indigenous cultures.

## OUT (DISNEY+, SHORT)

A young man rehearses a nerve-wracking conversation with his parents before they visit. This short from Pixar features Disney's first ever main LGBTQIA+ character.

## STEVEN UNIVERSE (NETFLIX) AND ADVENTURE TIME (TV SERIES)

These two are TV shows, but they're way ahead of the curve. Adventure Time gave us one of the best queer relationships in animation with the totally-besotted Marceline and Princess Bubblegum, a goth-fairy dynamic for the ages. Meanwhile, the Steven Universe crew features queer couples and genderqueer characters, presented joyfully and without fanfare. Two funny, original, endearing shows for the whole family to enjoy.

**(12A)**

## LOVE, SIMON (DISNEY+ OR AMAZON PRIME)

Love, Simon is groundbreaking in its normality. In many ways it's your standard teen movie with high school drama, clean-cut actors, and a chart-friendly soundtrack. It's hard to believe that this was the first film from a major Hollywood studio to focus on a queer teen romance as its central storyline. But here we are, and we're glad it's a total delight.

## HEARTSTOPPER (NETFLIX)

Follow Charlie and Nick and their group of queer pals as they play rugby, listen to music, fall in love, and navigate their first relationships - just like any other teenager!

**(15A)**

## DATING AMBER (AMAZON PRIME)

This recent Irish release tells the story of two queer teens who fake a relationship in a bid to stem the bullying they face at school. A light-hearted coming-of-age tale laced with nostalgia and a very sweet friendship at its heart.

## DISCLOSURE (NETFLIX)

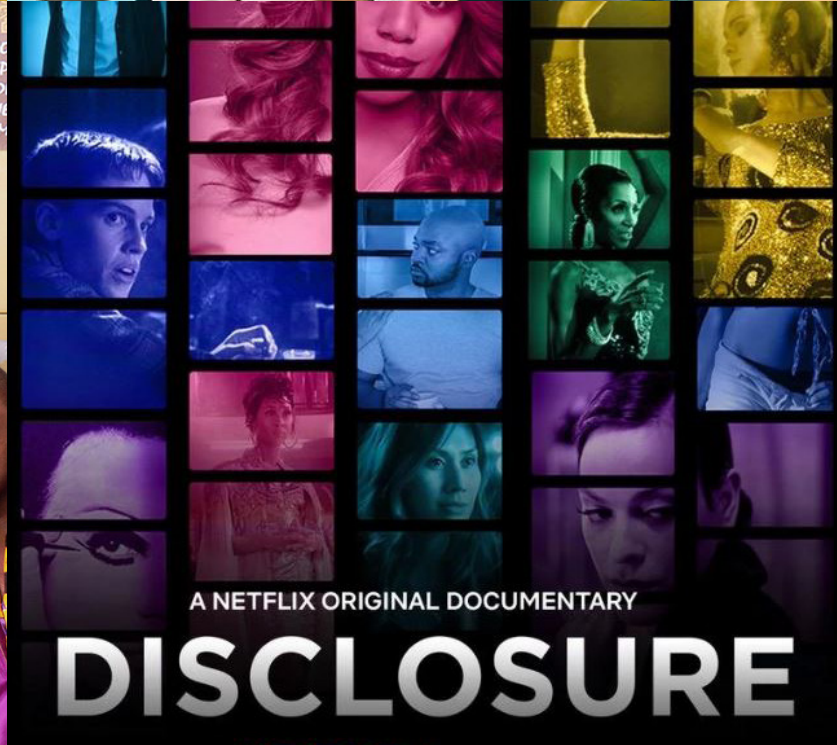
The relentless, harmful transphobia faced by trans communities worldwide is hugely influenced by stigmatising media representations of their identity. This groundbreaking documentary draws important lines to show that ignorant screen portrayals of trans characters have had indelible effects on the lives of real trans people.

## TRANS/TRAS (TG4 PLAYER)

This recent TG4 documentary tells the story of a trans couple living in Cavan - their daily lives, their hopes for the future, and the reality of being a young trans person in Ireland today, as Gaeilge.

## SEX EDUCATION (NETFLIX)

Does what it says on the tin! A funny and heart-warming show which also addresses the pitfalls of sexuality and identity for teens. A must-watch.



## FAQ

### MY CHILD, OR THEIR FRIEND, HAS COME OUT, BUT USED A TERM I DON'T UNDERSTAND

Use the terminology guide in this resource to find out more about the person's identity. If it's not listed, then speak to them about what this identification means for them. It's okay not to understand, and it's okay to ask questions so long as you remain open-minded and supportive. There are many, many more identities that people can identify as, compared to even just a few years ago. So, if you don't know or understand, just ask and allow them to explain in their own words. You can always do your own research as well!

### MY CHILD HAS COME OUT, SHOULD I TELL MY FRIENDS OR EXTENDED FAMILY?

This is a personal decision and should be discussed with the person who has come out. They may want to keep it between the two of you for now, or they may want you to inform people; it's important not to assume what they want and speak to them about it.

This may be big news for you, and you may need to speak to someone about it, but if you do, ask them to keep it private until you know the person's wishes on the matter. Many LGBTQIA+ people come out several times, in the process of coming to terms with it themselves, so telling you might just be one part of their process, and it's important to speak with them about it.

One of the most common dilemmas a parent or guardian can face is often that a child will come out to one parent/guardian and not the other. This is tricky and reflects that your child is more comfortable telling you, for example, and means that a lot of discretion should be exercised on your part going forward. Only you can judge what is best for your family, while also keeping in mind the best interests of the child or young person.

### I THINK MY CHILD IS LGBTQIA+, SHOULD I SPEAK TO THEM ABOUT IT?

Coming out is a personal journey, and one that each person must come to in their own time. Our advice would be to create an atmosphere of acceptance by speaking openly about LGBTQIA+ people you know

and admire, and therefore alleviating any worry that the person might have about a negative reaction, but not to pry, as the person may not be ready.

We must also note that there is no definite way to tell if a person is LGBTQIA+ without them telling you. The LGBTQIA+ community represents a vast variety of personalities and interests, equally, cis straight people can also have characteristics which do not adhere to gender norms, this does not necessarily indicate anything about their sexual or romantic orientation or, indeed gender identity.

Sometimes a person, especially a young person, may simply not know, and could be on a journey of discovery, which takes time.

### IS IT MORE CONFUSING FOR YOUNG PEOPLE WITH ALL THESE LABELS?

The short answer? No! Young people are embracing fluidity, and new terminology, all of the time. The internet has helped LGBTQIA+ young people find language to describe themselves, and communities and individuals with similar experiences to theirs. In this they can feel less alone, and know they have support.

**“I WOULD TELL ALL PARENTS  
TO LET THEIR CHILDREN BE  
THEIR TRUE SELVES, LOVE  
AND SUPPORT THEM AND LET  
THEM BE WHO THEY ARE.”**



## **BIOGRAPHY**

**David Norris - he/him - Independent Senator for Trinity College Dublin**

Senator David Norris is an independent Senator for Trinity College Dublin. Senator Norris has been a spokesperson, activist, and figure head for the Irish LGBTQIA+ rights movement for many years. It was his legal challenges against the Irish state, which led to the European Court of Human Rights in 1988 ruling that Ireland's law on homosexuality was contrary to the European Convention on Human Rights. This verdict led to the decriminalization of homosexuality in the Republic of Ireland in 1993.

# TERMINOLOGY

The words and terms used within the LGBTQIA+ community can seem daunting, but with a little bit of time they are easy to understand. We understand a lot of these terms may be new to you, and we have endeavoured to make them as simple as possible.

*Quick tip: Definitions are changing all the time, and it's difficult to get a definition 100% accurate. This is about how humans live and love so it's complicated and there is a lot of grey area!*

**ALLIES:** People who identify as cisgender (see cis below) and/or straight and believe in social and legal equality for LGBTQIA+ people. LGBTQIA+ people can (and should!) also be allies to other members of the community, e.g. a lesbian can be an ally to trans people.

**ASEXUAL:** Refers to someone who has little to no sexual attraction or desire for sexual relationships. An asexual person may still have romantic relationships. Asexuality exists on a spectrum that can include identities like demisexual and gray-asexual.

**ASSIGNED AT BIRTH:** Assigned at birth refers to the way in which your sex is recorded on your birth certificate. When a baby is born, they are assigned a sex based on the physical appearance of their genitalia. Typically, babies are either assigned female at birth (AFAB), or assigned male at birth (AMAB).

**CISGENDER (CIS):** Cisgender refers to people who are not trans; someone who had the correct gender assigned to them at birth. For example, if someone was assigned male at birth (AMAB) and they identify as a man, then they are a cisgender man, or cis man, also referred to as a “man”. If someone was assigned female at birth (AFAB) and they identify as a woman, then they are a cisgender woman, or a cis woman, also referred to as a “woman”.

*Quick tip: These labels are not a judgement of a person's value, they are just ways to describe people. Being cis is not bad, being trans is not bad, they are judgement free labels.*

**CIS & STRAIGHT:** This the term we use to refer to people who are cisgender (see above) and heterosexual, ie not part of the LGBTQIA+ community.

**COMING OUT:** This is the process of revealing your sexual orientation and/or gender identity to individuals in your life; often incorrectly thought to be a one-time event, this is a lifelong and sometimes daily process.

**DISCRIMINATION:** Discrimination means making a distinction in favour of, or against, a person based on the group, class, or category to which a person belongs.

**GAY:** Refers to a man sexually and/or romantically attracted to other men or a woman who is sexually and/or romantically attracted to other women. People of other facets of the LGBTQIA+ community may also use the word gay to refer to themselves in a similar way to which the word Queer is used.

**GENDER IDENTITY:** Gender norms define what society considers male and female behaviour, and it leads to the formation of gender roles, which are the roles males and females are often expected to take in society.

**HETERONORMATIVITY:** Refers to heterosexual identities being considered the norm, to the exclusion of any other sexual orientation or gender identity. One way that it is demonstrated is by the lack of representation of LGBTQIA+ people and relationships in the media.

**HETEROSEXUAL/STRAIGHT:** Someone who is attracted to people of the opposite gender from themselves.

**HOMOPHOBIA/TRANSPHOBIA:** Homophobia encompasses a range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian or gay. Transphobia relates to prejudice directed specifically at those who don't adhere to gender norms and people who are trans.

**INTERSEX:** Refers to individuals who are born with sex characteristics (such as chromosomes, genitals, and/or hormonal structure) that do not belong strictly to male or female categories as designated in medical circles, or that belong to both at the same time. Being intersex is as common around the world as having red hair.

A person with an intersex variation may have elements of what is considered both “male” and

“female” anatomy, have different internal organs than external organs, or have anatomy that is inconsistent with chromosomal sex. These variations can be identified at birth (where observed in the person’s genitalia), at puberty (when the person either does not develop certain expected secondary sex characteristics, or develops characteristics that were not expected), later in adulthood (for example when fertility difficulties present) or an autopsy.

**LESBIAN:** Typically refers to a woman who is primarily sexually and/or romantically attracted to other women. This term is inclusive of trans women and non-binary, gender-fluid, or genderqueer people who may feel the term best matches their identity.

**NON-BINARY:** Non-binary refers to those who identify outside the male/female binary. It can come under the trans umbrella. People who are non-binary may use they/them pronouns e.g. “They are really nice, they live in Dublin, they are going to the shop. “

**OUTING:** When someone reveals another person’s sexual orientation or gender identity to an individual or group, often without the person’s consent or approval.

**PANSEXUAL:** Refers to someone who is attracted to all genders, or is attracted to people regardless of gender.

**PREJUDICE:** Prejudice is defined as a preconceived opinion that is not based on reason or actual experience.

**PRIDE:** Pride is an annual celebration of LGBTQIA+ communities held around the world. In Ireland most of the large cities and towns have their own Pride Festival or else they have floats in the Dublin Pride Festival.

**QUEER:** Queer was initially used as an insult, but it has been reclaimed by the LGBTQIA+ community. It is now used as an umbrella term to describe the community or things associated with it. Such as Queer Studies, Queer Film or Queer Literature. Sometimes people of any LGBTQIA+ identity may describe themselves as Queer.

**RAINBOW:** The rainbow has represented LGBTQIA+ people since 1978. The colours reflect

diversity within the LGBTQIA+ community.

**SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** Who you are attracted to.

**TRANSGENDER:** Transgender (or trans) people, like cisgender people, are assigned a sex at birth. However, trans people do not identify with this assignment or its traditional expectations. Trans people have a gender identity which is different from the sex which was assigned to them at birth. For example, someone assigned male at birth, who later identifies as female, is transgender.

**TRANSITION:** The period of time in which a trans or non-binary person begins to live in their true gender identity, rather than the one they were assigned at birth. A person can transition personally (acknowledging to themselves that they are trans), socially (changing name/pronouns and adjusting their gender expression), legally (accessing legal gender recognition and documents in their true gender and name), and medically, but everyone has a different journey, and no trans person is obliged to take any of these steps.

# RESOURCES

If you feel you need any support, there are many wonderful organisations which can help you.

## BELONGTO

BeLongTo runs a plethora of services for both LGBTQIA+ young people and their parents, get in touch, they will be happy to help!

[www.belongto.ie](http://www.belongto.ie)

## CARA-FRIEND

Cara-Friend operates in Northern Ireland only and runs a number of regional youth groups for young people aged 12-25 who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and those who are questioning their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. It also offers parents and guardians advice on how best to support their LGBTQIA+ children, as well as giving support and guidance on a one-to-one basis to young people themselves.

[www.cara-friend.org.uk](http://www.cara-friend.org.uk)

## CHILDREN'S BOOKS IRELAND

Children's Books Ireland is a national organisation promoting child literacy and the love of a good read. They aim to inspire and enable children and young people to become readers for life. Their LGBTQIA+ book recommendations for young readers of all ages are unbeatable!

[www.childrensbooksireland.ie](http://www.childrensbooksireland.ie)

## DUBLIN LESBIAN LINE

Dublin Lesbian Line is a confidential support helpline, operated by a group of enthusiastic female-identified (LGBTQIA+) volunteers on Thursday nights from 6.30pm until 9pm. DLL is dedicated to providing rather excellent telephone support and online support to the LGBTQIA+ community. Don't be fooled by their name however, as they offer support to people all over Ireland with many problems, issues and concerns. In fact, many of our callers are not even female!

[www.dublinlesbianline.ie](http://www.dublinlesbianline.ie)

## DUBLIN LGBTQ+ PRIDE:

Dublin LGBTQ+ Pride are dedicated to raising awareness of the discrimination faced by LGBTQ+ people, promoting diversity and inclusion in society and championing equality for all people.

Thanks to Dublin LGBTQ+ Pride for allowing us use images in this guide book.

[www.dublinpride.ie](http://www.dublinpride.ie)

## EQUALITY FOR CHILDREN:

Equality for Children is an Irish organisation campaigning for equal rights for LGBTQ+ parents and families in Ireland.

[www.equalityforchildren.ie](http://www.equalityforchildren.ie)

## INTO LGBT+ TEACHER'S GROUP

The INTO LGBT+ Teachers' Group supports and advances the cause of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender primary school teachers in Ireland and advocates for LGBT+ inclusion in primary schools.

[www.into.ie](http://www.into.ie)

## LGBT IRELAND

LGBT Ireland is a national organisation underpinned by localised knowledge and responses. Together with our network members, they provide support, training, and advocacy which aims to improve the lives of LGBT+ people across Ireland. They run the Transgender family support line, the National LGBT Helpline, and online chat support.

[www.lgbt.ie](http://www.lgbt.ie)

## LOVING OUR OUT KIDS (LOOK)

LOOK has support groups, a phone line, and many ways in which they can help.

[www.lovingouroutkids.org](http://www.lovingouroutkids.org)

## **MPOWER PROGRAMME**

The MPOWER Programme at HIV Ireland is a suite of peer-driven community-level interventions which aim to achieve a reduction in the acquisition of HIV and STIs and an overall improvement of sexual health and wellbeing among gay, bisexual and men who have sex with men (gbMSM). Find out more.

[mpower.hivireland.ie](http://mpower.hivireland.ie)

## **SAILNI**

SailNI in Northern Ireland offers parents, guardians and families of those who come out as transgender the often necessary support to come to terms with their child's gender identity.

[www.sailni.com](http://www.sailni.com)

## **SHOUTOUT**

We are the island of Ireland's largest provider of LGBTQIA+ workshops to schools, which we have been providing since 2012. Our volunteers travel around the island to tell stories, give participants information and ask questions concerning LGBTQIA+ related issues, and to address issues of bullying and discrimination in schools, youth groups, and workplaces.

[www.shoutout.ie](http://www.shoutout.ie)

## **SPUNOUT**

Spunout is Ireland's youth information website created by young people, for young people.

[www.spunout.ie](http://www.spunout.ie)

## **TENI - TRANSGENDER EQUALITY NETWORK IRELAND**

TENI has been working in Ireland for the equality of trans people for many years. They have training available for workplaces, as well as support for trans people and their families.

[www.teni.ie](http://www.teni.ie)

## **THE SWITCHBOARD**

The Switchboard offers support to the Irish LGBTQ+ community 365 days a year.

[www.theswitchboard.ie](http://www.theswitchboard.ie)

**Photos courtesy of ShoutOut & Dublin Pride**

**Booklet design by Michael Galbraith**



# *PROTECT QUEER YOUTH*

END HOMOPHOBIC, BIPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC  
BULLYING IN IRISH SCHOOLS

[WWW.SHOUTOUT.IE](http://WWW.SHOUTOUT.IE)



# SHOUTOUT

[www.shoutout.ie](http://www.shoutout.ie)

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