

# Suggestions for “Coming Out” to Religious Parents

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## 1) Know your parents.

### On Religion:

- What kind of Catholic or religious people are your parents?
- Are they generally conservative on issues such as birth control, end-of-life issues, etc.?
- Do they rely heavily on external authority in making moral judgments?
- Are they Biblical literalists? (Do they understand and interpret the Bible literally?)
- Have they expressed strong opinions on Prop 8 or other gay rights issues?

### On Culture:

- What is their ethnic or cultural background?
- What cultural messages have they received about sexual orientation and gender identity?

## 2) Pick a good time.

- Holidays, birthdays, weddings, anniversaries, and other special events are NOT the best time.
- Pick a time when you are assured of privacy as a family.
- Pick a time that allows enough quiet for serious conversation.
- Note: If your parents are on the Conservative end of the religious spectrum, timing may be critical. You may want to wait until you are out of the house and no longer need their financial support.

## 3) Have an ally.

- Is there someone in your family or among close family friends who is supportive of LGBT individuals? You may wish to come out to that person first.
- An aunt or uncle, a sister or brother, may be a good person to talk with before you approach your parents.
- This “safe” person may be willing to come with you or to be “on call” when you speak to your parents.

## 4) Have educational materials available for your parents.

- Note: Whatever level of education your parents have, and even if they have gay friends, chances are they have a lot of misinformation about sexual orientation and gender identity.
- Provide literature for them (i.e. PFLAG website: [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org), Human Rights Campaign website: [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org), recommended books from PFLAG Chapters.)
- It might also be helpful to have a supportive family member, a priest or other clergy member “on call” to talk with your parents if your parents feel they need a voice of authority.
- Have the website address, helpline number, and meeting information of a local PFLAG.
- Don't force them to read anything or speak to anyone right away. It may take some time for your parents to be ready to do so. Give them time to process.

## 5) Have a support system for yourself.

- Some parents who are ultimately supportive, even advocates for their LGBT children, may say or do hurtful things initially, without intention, or meaning to. Keep in mind that some parents are shocked, distressed, sad, angry, and uninformed.
- You may have to be “grown-up” for a while. Having a supportive counselor, advisor, open and affirming priest or clergy, or wise friend, is important so that you can talk about your own feelings during this process.
- It is imperative that you have a support system that will help you stay physically, economically, and emotionally-safe.
- If you are living at home, you should identify some place you can stay at if your parents are uncomfortable having you at home.
- If they are paying your tuition, think carefully about how you would manage should they decide to withhold it.

## 6) Give it time.

- Coming to terms with your sexual orientation or gender identity has taken you time----- months, perhaps even years.
- Your parents need and deserve time to go through their process as well.
- Be patient and supportive of them.
- Be prepared to reintroduce educational materials or help them find information on other aspects of the topic.