

My-ID PARENTS GUIDANCE

Deliverable PR3.2

Manual on how to reach out and work with parents

Fondazione Villa Montesca, 2023



Co-funded by
the European Union

Table of Contents

My-ID PARENTS GUIDANCE	1
Table of Contents	2
<i>0. Introduction.....</i>	<i>4</i>
Aims of the guide	4
<i>1. Let's start from the basics: refresh your knowledge on "Sexual and Gender Identity"5</i>	
1.2 What does "Identity" mean.....	5
1.3 What is Sexual and Gender Identity	6
1.3.1 What is Biological Sex	7
1.3.2 What is Gender.....	7
1.3.3 What is Sexual Orientation	14
1.4 Factors that influence Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	16
<i>2. Moving forward... get to know more!.....</i>	<i>18</i>
2.1 Difference Between Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation	18
2.2 The spectrum of options related to gender identity	19
2.3 The Spectrum of options related to Sexual Orientation	20
2.4 Signs of Gender Dysphoria	21
2.5 Some tips and stories about prejudices and stereotypes	22
<i>3. How to speak about gender identity and sexual orientation with your child/teen</i>	<i>26</i>
3.1 How to secure a safe and helpful conversation.....	26
3.2 The key messages you have to point out.....	28
3.3 Speaking about gender roles and stereotypes about sexual orientation	30
3.4 Some examples in literature for exploring gender identity and sexual orientation	31
Novels:.....	31

Movies:	33
TV Shows:	34
4. Your child comes out: what do you have to do?	36
4.1 Coming out: basic meaning.....	36
4.2 What happens in your child’s mind	39
4.3 They speak with you (parent) and what you can (have to) say.....	42
4.4 How you (parent) can (have to) do for helping them	43
4.5 They do not speak with you (parent) but they find another confident (friends, other adults...) and happens to you (parent) to know that by chance	47
5. Your child decides to Not come Out: What kind of support can you give?.....	49
5.1 What should you (parent) do?.....	49
5.2 Homophobia and transphobia: what are the obstacles.....	50
5.3 Useful parenting practices	53
6. Terms to know and use (glossary).....	57
Deliverable information.....	61
Project result coordinator.....	62
Version history.....	62
Author list.....	62
Note on language	63

0. Introduction

Aims of the guide

This is a brief manual containing information on how to reach out to parents and how to work on sexual and gender diversity with them. In order to ensure the applicability of this output, a core structure has been developed and each partner organisation adapted it to their specific circumstances (geographical, social, cultural...).

Inside the guide, we have included a short manual (linked to the propose methodology) with activities on how to discuss and understand this topic with the aim to direct involve the parents in this educative process, thus creating a whole school approach for the prevention of gender and homophobic discrimination and for countering stereotyping and stigmatization.

1. Let's start from the basics: refresh your knowledge on “Sexual and Gender Identity”

Although people may sometimes have a very clear, and even all-too-defined, idea of who a man or woman is, how they should behave and who they should like, the reality is actually very different and far more multifaceted.

When it comes to sexuality, the basic rule everyone should keep in mind is that “everyone is made in their own way”. Consequently, sexuality might be considered on one hand the most spontaneous and natural thing ever and, at the same time, one of the most complex aspects of human nature, given the variety of ways in which it can manifest itself.

1.2 What does “Identity” mean

The meaning of the term “identity” may seem easy to understand, but are we really sure that we would be able to answer a person who asks us what it means?

We could argue that “identity” refers to each individual's perception of himself/herself, that is, his/her consciousness of existing as a person in relation to other individuals, with whom he/she forms a social group.

It becomes immediately clear that this perception of identity is not only individual; it is the mutual recognition between the individual and society. Thus, it involves a subjective aspect (the perception that others recognize the individual his/her identification and continuity).

1.3 What is Sexual and Gender Identity

Talking specifically about sexuality and gender, the concept of identity is interpreted in a quite peculiar way: let's find out how.

Human sexual and gender identity is composed of 4 major macro-areas that we will shortly analyse more specifically and that can interact with each other in a myriad of ways, thus making each individual unique and unrepeatable. Sexuality is a bio-psycho-social reality that affects the whole person and all areas of his/her life. Therefore, we are literally affected by these dimensions from the moment we are born, in fact, we like to say that we are affected by them well before that.

In order to better understand what we are talking about we want to introduce you a dear friend who always helps us get some clarity:

my idea to be myself

identity

attraction

sex

expression

IDENTITY: how you see and label yourself...

Woman:	not at all	.....	very much
Man:	not at all	.....	very much
Hetero:	not at all	.....	very much
Gay:	not at all	.....	very much
Bisexual:	not at all	.....	very much
Lesbian:	not at all	.....	very much
Other label:	not at all	.....	very much

ATTRACTION: who you feel attracted to and how...

Romantically

To women:	not at all	.....	very much
To man:	not at all	.....	very much
To both:	not at all	.....	very much

Sexually

To women:	not at all	.....	very much
To man:	not at all	.....	very much
To both:	not at all	.....	very much

SEX: your biological markers...

Chromosomes:	XY	.....	XX
Hormones:	oestrogen & progesterone	.....	testosterone
Genitals:	clitoris & vagina	.....	penis & scrotum
Gonads (glands):	ovary & egg cells	.....	testicles & sperm

EXPRESSION: how you present yourself...

Feminine:	not at all	.....	very much
Gender-neutral:	not at all	.....	very much
Masculine:	not at all	.....	very much
Depends on situation:	not at all	.....	very much
Sexually active:	not at all	.....	a lot

Reviewed by GALE, 2023

Here's to you the Genderbread Person! As you can see, our little assistant is composed of 4 elements that correspond to the aforementioned macro-areas: biological sex, gender identity, gender expression and sexual orientation. These are the elements that make up a person's sexual and gender identity, in all its complexity. So, let's analyse them briefly.

1.3.1 What is Biological Sex

As you can see, the Biological Sex is symbolically represented by the little person's genitals. Actually, the definition of Biological Sex is based on several factors: genetic makeup, genital organs and hormonal picture. Based on these criteria observed at birth, the child is assigned a male or female sex.

However, in addition to the most common chromosome pairs, XX (female) and XY (male), other combinations are possible (e.g., X0, XXY, ...). The shape of the genital organs and the amount of sex hormones in the body can also vary. Both genetically and hormonally and in terms of the appearance of the external and internal genital organs, human biology is therefore not limited to the two categories of "male" and "female". Intersex is an umbrella term for numerous variations in sexual development, i.e., the presence of innate biological (genetic and/or anatomical and/or hormonal) sexual characteristics that do not correspond to social and medical norms of male and female sex.

These variations in sexual characteristics can be detected before or after birth, during childhood, during puberty, in adulthood, or even never. Intersex people generally have healthy bodies and are in good health. Nevertheless, even today, children born with a variation in development of their biological sex are subjected to operations and/or other medical treatments aimed at "normalizing" their sexual characteristics without their consent in order to "conform" them to the binary sex norm, even though most of these procedures are not medically necessary.

1.3.2 What is Gender

First fundamental information is that biological sexual characteristics and gender are not absolutely the same thing. Gender has nothing biological about it; it is in fact a social construction. People are labelled at birth and must learn, over the years, to conform to certain cultural rules: as we will see better later on, there are gender stereotypes about the ways one should behave, the activities one should prefer, the attitudes one should

hold, the emotions one should feel etc. only and exclusively as being born biologically male or female. As you know, in our culture there are 2 genders which are supposed to be exactly like the biological sexes (i.e., male and female), but this should not be taken for granted and universal, there are cultures scattered around the world that recognize many more!

For example, here is reported the iconic case of the Bugis, who are one of the 3 major ethnic and linguistic groups on the Indonesian island of Sulawesi.



Consider that the Bugis recognize 5 genders, in addition to the female and male genders there are:

- **The “Calalai”, who are people born biologically female**, but who live their lives as men traditionally do, for example by wearing typically male clothing and doing men’s work;
- **The “Calabai”, who are people born biologically male**, but who largely conform to female behaviours and roles;
- **The “Bissu”, a gender that can be seen as a combination of the feminine and masculine genders**. The Bissu have a different way of dressing than the typical male and female dress, and they also have specific roles in society. They are sort of priests who conduct spiritual rituals and are seen as superhuman beings who make blessings for people.

Even in other cultures the genders may be more than two, Indian Hijras for example, are biological males who due to an accident, disease or otherwise, have been castrated and are considered a third gender, these dress like women and are considered a mixture of a sorceress and a courtesan, they live in their own quarters and have sexual and romantic relationships only with each other.

Native American Indians also have three genders, this is because children are assigned to a gender not at birth but at the age of six, and gender is assigned based on how the child behaves, his/her predispositions etc. Some male and biologically normal children manifest predominantly female propensities and tastes, these are considered by Native Americans to be a third gender. These people are considered to be spiritually empowered, so they are placed high in the social hierarchy, marry men, and are not considered “strange”.

Since the Middle Ages, it was customary in Europe to recognize only two genders. But in the last decades there is a growing recognition this is a limited conception and that people who don't fit in such a “binary” conception may get hurt by it.

Therefore, we must learn as much as possible to relativizing what we see and not absolutizing it; we need to try to have an expanded view of the world that allows us to understand that ours is only one of many cultures on this planet and that so many things we learn, even and especially passively, from the time we are children are not determined by nature, but derive from a long process of filtering operated by beliefs and convictions rooted in our society. So, what exactly is gender identity?

1.3.2.1 What is Gender Identity: definitions, theories and fact

As you can see from the image, Gender Identity is represented by the Genderbread Person's brain: this is to symbolically signify that this component of Sexual Identity represents how the person perceives himself/herself, as a man, a woman, or another aspect of gender.

Gender identity, in essence, is asking a person the question “How do you feel about your gender?”, it reflects how we identify ourselves regardless of our biological sex. As we will see more fully later, our gender identity may or may not agree with the gender identity we are assigned at birth. The American Psychiatric Association defines gender identity as: *“A person’s continuous and persistent internal sense of being a man, woman, and/or another gender (e.g., gender queer, gender fluid)”*.

So, as a first thing, continuity and persistence is highlighted, this is because normally Gender Identity, once established, does not change with the passage of years. Analysing the final part of the definition we can infer that there are not only and exclusively two gender identities, male and female, but there are variations which have a huge number of nuances and positions, all unique and with equal dignity to exist. In this regard, always remember that in sexology (as well as in human sexuality) there are no blacks and whites: sexology is the discipline of greys.

As we have already noted, gender is assigned at birth based on the perceived biological sex of the child, or even before birth, when through ultrasound we can tell which biological sex the little unborn child seems to belong to (that is why we told you we like to say that our Gender Identity is defined and influences us from before we are born). This assignation is not a neutral issue: it creating a set of expectation. These expectations are called gender roles (or gender stereotypes). We might say that gender roles are a expectations that society places on us. To give you an idea, think trivially about what a parent typically does when he/she finds out that he/she is having a little girl: the little pink-dyed room, the little dresses with the little flowers, the little dolls etc. These are already roles and expectations, and the baby hasn’t even been born yet!

The richest and most recent definition of Gender Identity can be considered the one proposed by Egan and Perry (2001), who describe 5 components:

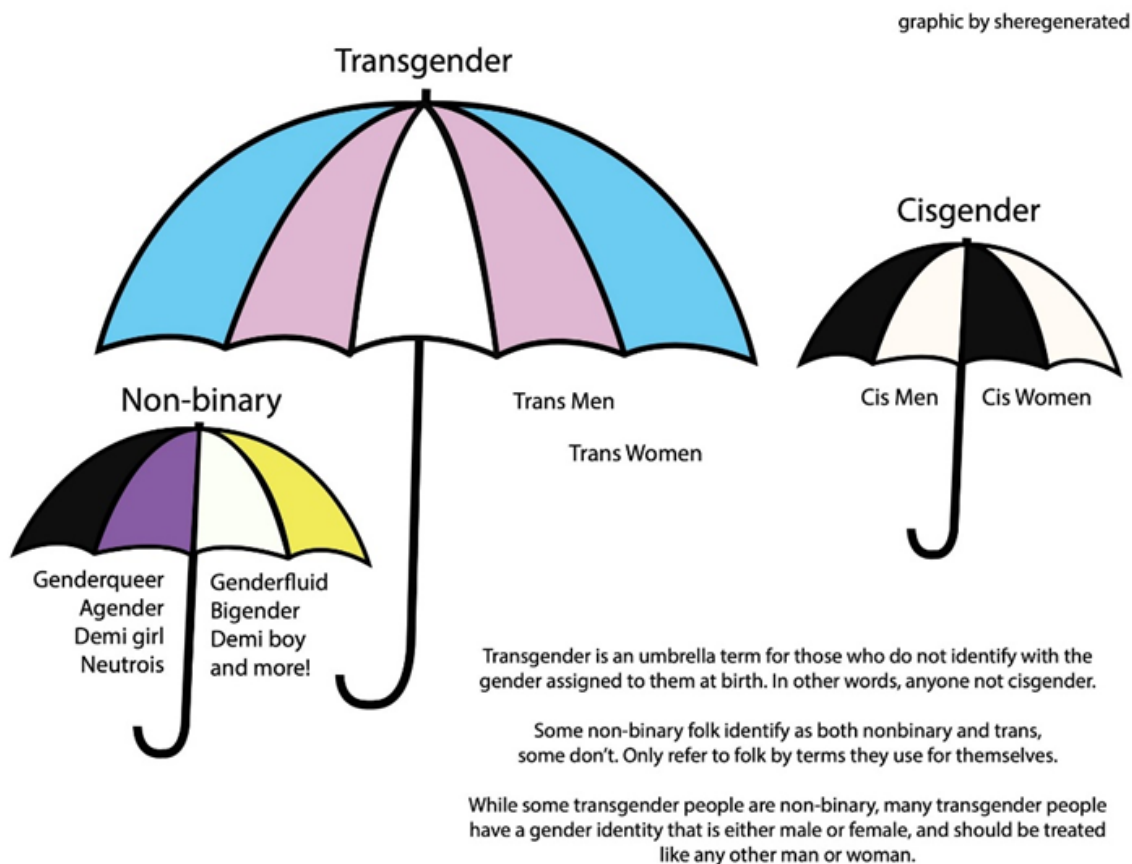
- **Membership awareness:** the knowing to which gender one belongs;
- **Gender typicality:** the degree to which the individual realizes that one’s qualities are similar to those of others who belong to the same gender group;
- **Gender contentment:** the degree to which the individual is satisfied with his/her gender;
- **Perceived pressure:** the degree to which the individual perceives demands from himself/herself or others to conform to the norms of his own gender group;

- **Intergroup bias:** the belief that one's gender group is superior to others.

This elaborate definition makes clear that just “feeling yourself” to be male or female may be influenced by social expectations, so it is more complicated than just making a simple individual choice.

At this point let's take one further step forward and delve into what are most likely terms that you have probably already heard. Who is a cisgender person? Don't be frightened, a cisgender person is simply a person whose Gender Identity is congruent with the gender they were assigned at birth. For example, you are a cisgender person when you are biologically male, and assigned as male at birth, and at the same time you identify as male, and therefore present male gender identity.

Who, on the other hand, is a transgender person? A transgender person is, as opposed to a cisgender person, a person whose Gender Identity differs from the gender they were assigned at birth. For example, you are a transgender person if you were born biologically male (and thus were assigned male at birth) but you identify as female, and thus present a female Gender Identity.



As you see in the image there are many terms that can be used, each placing more emphasis on a specific view and perspective than another. Let us keep in mind that we are dealing with a vast and very complex subject, and that the labels we are giving serve a didactic and illustrative purpose, but each person in reality is unique and very difficult to fit into definite and sharp categories.

Then, “transgender” is actually an umbrella term that encompasses within it all those people whose Gender Identity differs in some way from the gender assigned at birth. Beware, though: only some transgenders suffer from a condition called Gender Dysphoria, which we will explore later. It is therefore useful to emphasize how gender variant behaviours (thus not conforming to what we would expect to have given our biological sex) are not pathological! And they are not necessarily indicative of a transgender identity (this is true even and especially during childhood: children may express preferences that are more or less adherent to gender stereotypes)!



A person may dress, behave, or prefer activities stereotypically expected of the opposite gender but not identify with it, identifying with what he/she was assigned at birth. In other words, people may have gender-variant behaviours without being transgender;



or they may identify with another gender but not suffer for it (and in this case we are talking about a transgender person); otherwise, if identification with another gender leads to extreme suffering and impairment of the person's life, we talk about gender dysphoria.

So, can having a transgender gender identity be understood as a choice? Absolutely not! It is not a choice, just as having a cisgender identity is not a choice. Can you remember an exact moment in your life when you consciously

decided which gender to identify with? But more importantly, why would it be a mental disorder to have a Gender Identity not congruent with the one assigned at birth? The American Psychological Association and the WHO have decided being transgender is not a mental disease. Gender Dysphoria is a mental disease, but people only suffer from this when they experience profound psychological distress and impairment of their major areas of functioning due to insecurity about their gender identity.

1.3.2.2 What is Gender Expression/Role

Let's then briefly talk about Gender Expression (or role), which is another aspect represented by the Genderbread Person.

Gender Expression answers the question "How do I express who I am?", so can be regarded as everything one does to express to others one's membership in a certain gender. Such a role can be the result of social customs to which the individual chooses to conform or not, to show people their adherence to the way a certain gender "should behave".

Gender roles are expected from birth of the child, who gradually learns how to comply to them. Expected gender roles partially create self-concepts of children regarding their gender role, which stabilize at about age 6 and thereafter go on to produce other values, attitudes and social behaviours culturally characteristic of the gender with which they identify (as already stated, gender roles change from culture to culture).

Gender expression, then, represents the way we talk, the way we dress, the world we move in, the interests we manifest etc. Thus, people already from an early age, in addition to having identified with a particular gender, have learned typical rules whereby they behave consequently to the gender with which they identify and which their parents and the society have ascribed to them.

1.3.3 What is Sexual Orientation

The fourth and final element that makes up a person's Sexual Identity is Sexual Orientation, symbolically represented by the heart of the Genderbread Person: it stands for who or what the person is romantically and/or sexually attracted to (it is in this dimension that we talk about homosexuality, heterosexuality, bisexuality etc.). Thus, a person's Sexual Orientation answers the question "Who do I like?" and is defined by 6 dimensions:

- **Sexual behaviour** (i.e., with whom the person has sexual relations);
- **Erotic attraction** (i.e., toward whom the person has sexual desire);
- **Sexual fantasies** (i.e., about whom the person fantasizes);
- **Affective preference** (i.e., who the person becomes infatuated with and/or falls in love with);
- **Self-definition** (i.e., how the person defines his or her sexual orientation);
- **Self-expression** (i.e., how persons show their sexual orientation (coming-out))

These 6 dimensions may vary over time and especially may not be congruent with each other; for example, persons may define themselves as heterosexual and have sexual relations with people of the same sex; or, persons may be predominantly aroused by same-sex attractions and yet not consider themselves as such; or, persons may be erotically attracted to men and fall in love with women; ... so, a person's Sexual Orientation is as complex as it is changeable and represents a kind of personal map in which dimensions are composed in a completely subjective way.

It is a common thought, in our society, that a person's Sexual Orientation is a characteristic peculiar to the individual, like age, height, or Biological Sex. However, this definition does not embrace the full complexity of Sexual Orientation: in fact, it is also defined by the relationships a person has with others. For example, you can express and define your sexual orientation based on how you behave with other people, who you hold hands with, how you talk about my partner, who you give a kiss to and so on by attributing it to "male" or "female" behaviour. All this illustrates how Sexual Orientation is deeply connected to a person's relational needs. From this follows how fundamental it is that Sexual Orientation is not something that can be kept to oneself, hidden and concealed from other people, because it does not solely and exclusively reflect a private sexual behaviour, but for a large part concerns the public and social way of relating to one's world.

That said, is homosexuality (or any other non-heterosexual orientation) a mental disorder? No! All major mental health organizations agree that homosexuality is not a disease, but just a variant of sexual behaviour. The World Health Organization in 1990 defined homosexuality as "*a natural variant of human sexual behaviour*". It is therefore essential that you see homosexuality, as well as heterosexuality and any other Sexual Orientation, as one of the many natural and expected outcomes of a person's psychosexual development; none of these outcomes is to be considered as abnormal or pathological. Hence the fact that a person is attracted to people of the same sex for exactly the same reason that a person may be attracted to people of the opposite sex. Nothing more, nothing less.

An important impediment to the social acceptance of same-sex behaviour or relationships is the opinion in some religious scriptures that same-sex behaviour is "unnatural" and therefore "sinful". The interpretations of the relevant quotes from scriptures and the way religious communities deal in in practice with people who express their sexual orientation can widely differ. If you would like to read more about this, we refer to

<https://www.gale.info/en/database/reading/homosexuality-and-transgenderism-in-the-bible>

<https://www.gale.info/en/database/reading/homosexuality-and-transgenderism-in-the-quran/>

1.4 Factors that influence Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

Although it is not yet known what determines a person's Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation, most explanations attribute their development to a mix of psychological, social, genetic, hormonal, and cultural causes. However, when reflecting this, it is important to consider whether the question is neutral or prejudiced. If you are only interested in why people develop a non-heterosexual or non-cisgender identity, your interest is likely to be prejudiced. When you are also interested in why cisgender heterosexuals develop as they do, it is likely your interest is truly neutral and scientific.

1.4.1 How Children and Teens develop Sexual Orientation

It is assumed there is a biological component that predisposes people to be sexually attracted by other people. It may be some parts of the brain play a role in this. However, many scientists think that humans are potentially bisexual, and therefore have the potential to become sexually aroused regardless of the gender of the partner. It is likely that this potential bisexuality is with some predilection more for either sex to facilitate reproduction.

Even people who identify or behave as bisexual are usually not exact 50/50% bisexuals, but they tend to have a greater preference for one gender than the other. So, it would be better to talk about prevalently heterosexual or homosexual orientation, because everyone has a higher or lower threshold of homosexuality or heterosexuality. Therefore, in this view, orientation would develop predominantly out of a biological-hormonal disposition, which would then be expanded and consolidated by culture and society. Then, predominantly heterosexual persons who grow up in a culture that sees heterosexuality as the standard condition will pursue in that direction; if the same persons grow up in a culture that favours homosexual behaviour, they probably have such behaviour. However, at the present time, no etiological theory has been able to reach a minimum level of verifiability required by science to call a theory "true".

Typically, Sexual Orientation in European families emerges between middle childhood and early adolescence, so we are talking about an age range of roughly 7/8 to 12/13 years. However, we talk about tendencies! There are people who are clear about their Sexual Orientation well before they have had any kind of sexual experience; while there are other young people who, despite several experiences, are not clear about what their

orientation is. For example, there are people who gain awareness of their homosexuality in adulthood, perhaps after marrying a partner of the opposite sex and even having a child with their partner: cases like these, however, testify to how prejudice and discrimination can often influence, even significantly, the awareness and acceptance of one's Sexual Orientation. You should also remember that sexual orientation is not something static and unchanging, but can undergo variations over the course of an individual's life.

1.4.2 How Children and Teens develop Gender Identity

With respect to Gender Identity, stereotypical gender roles are generally impregnated in children and solidified around the age of 3-4 years, the age at which children identify with a gender and develop a Gender Role consistent with that the Biological Sex that they have assigned at birth and enforced by cultural customs. That is to say, most children around that age identify with one gender and then gradually learn to perfect this role according to the communities' cultural rules, which it absorbs by direct instruction or indirect social learning. It also gradually begins to recognize the gender of other people. According to this heteronormative view, 3 goals must be achieved with respect to gender development: "gender identity", "gender stability" and "full gender constancy":

- 1. Gender identity is the child's ability to self-label himself/herself as a boy/girl, achieved around the age of 2 to 3 years;*
- 2. After a couple of years, gender stability is acquired: the child begins to understand that gender is an enduring quality;*
- 3. Around 6/7 years of age, gender constancy or consistency is achieved, that is, the realization that despite superficial changes in appearance, gender typically remains constant throughout life.*

However, this view does not take into account that children may have a variety of gendered feelings and needs to express them, from a very young age to adulthood. Nor does it offer any space to teens who don't want to conform to maleness or femaleness (non-binary), or prefer to stay "fluid". Also, people with intersex variations don't find any place in this "development path".

2. Moving forward... get to know more!

Having come this far, we should have understood that Biological Sex, Gender Identity, Gender Expression and Sexual Orientation are closely intertwined concepts, but they are still separate dimensions that retain their own autonomy and interact in a variety of ways.

2.1 Difference Between Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation

Once again: while Gender Identity answers the question “Who am I?”, Sexual Orientation answers the question “To whom am I attracted?”. So, let’s take a little quiz:

1. What is the Sexual Orientation of a person assigned male at birth with a female Gender Identity who experiences affective-sexual attraction toward men?
 - The Sexual Orientation is heterosexual. (This person may be transsexual).
2. What, on the other hand, is the Sexual Orientation of a person assigned female at birth with a male Gender Identity who experiences affective-sexual attraction toward men?
 - The Sexual Orientation in this case is homosexual.

So here we can see that a person’s Sexual Orientation is defined by taking into consideration their Gender Identity and not their Biological Sex! Thus, the definition of the label to be used to categorize Sexual Orientation is related to its Gender Identity but not dependent on it.

2.2 The spectrum of options related to gender identity

As mentioned earlier, for years now there has been a move away from a binary view of gender (as exclusively male or female) to a more nonbinary view (which views gender as a spectrum within which multiple personal experiences have reason to exist).

The gender spectrum view is useful in describing the diverse experiences of many people who do not identify with the gender assigned to them at birth according to their perceived biological sex. So, let's summarize some definitions about the spectrum of options related to gender identity:

- **Cisgender:** denotes individuals who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological sex;
- **Transgender:** umbrella term for individuals who does not identify with the gender they were assigned at birth based on their biological sex;
- **Transsexual:** individuals who have undergone (social and/or surgical) sex transition (we address them using the pronoun corresponding to their Gender Identity AND NOT their Biological Sex);
- **Non-binary:** individuals who do not identify with either a totally male nor totally female gender, but still have a fixed self-image on their gender;
- **Genderfluid:** individual whose identification with genders fluctuates depending on mood and circumstances;
- **Genderqueer:** people who object to a system in which there are only two genders or against gender labelling at all;
- **Gender questioning:** individuals who question their gender identity (this sometimes overlaps with “genderqueer”);
- **Agender:** individual who does not identify with any gender.

As these identities are constantly evolving, it helps to use definitions and categories but being aware they are conventional and momentary. Moreover, it is necessary to point out that there are advantages but also points of weakness in dividing nonconforming people into subgroups: if, in fact, creating narrow categories allows for a mirroring and recognition of people within a group, rigidly using definitions could endorse processes of isolation, exclusion, and further marginalization. Considering the categories, we have described above as “labels” certainly helps people to identify themselves, as they can understand that there are others similar to them, but at the same time locking oneself

into a category does not allow one to experience other own aspects of identity. Categories, in this sense, could be understood as a starting point for self-recognition, but not as a point of arrival, since they risk caging the person and corralling all aspects of self into the category.

2.3 The Spectrum of options related to Sexual Orientation

Speaking of Sexual Orientation, we can base our taxonomy on 4 macro categories:

1. **Heterosexual: person affectively and sexually attracted to people of the other gender/sex**
2. **Homosexual: person affectively and sexually attracted to people of the same gender/sex** (Note that in US and UK English, the term “homosexual” is considered archaic, medicalised and outdated, while in European and other countries “homosexual” is often considered to be a neutral term).
 - **Gay:** same-sex attracted and self-identified man (the term is also used to refer to homosexual women in Anglo-Saxon-speaking countries)
 - **Lesbian:** same-sex attracted and self-identified woman
3. **Bi+: umbrella term describing all individuals who report being physically and/or emotionally attracted to individuals of more than one gender/sex, including individuals who identify with various identity labels:**
 - **Bisexual:** anyone who is affectively and sexually attracted to people of either gender/sex
 - **Pansexual:** anyone who feels attraction to someone else regardless of that person’s assigned sex at birth (not using the prefix “Bi-” goes beyond the view of gender binarism)
 - **Omnisexual:** anyone who is attracted to all genders or sexes assigned at birth
 - **Polysexual:** anyone who is attracted to several but not all genders and sexes
 - **Queer:** this term was originally used by people who object to sexual orientation labelling, but in many countries and among youth it has

become an umbrella term that encompasses anyone who is not heterosexual and/or does not identify with their sex assigned at birth

- **Sexually fluid:** anyone who feels an attraction that changes or can change over time to people of various genders/sexes
- **Homoflexible:** people who are usually attracted to their own gender/sex but may occasionally be attracted to the opposite gender/sex (from a gender binarism perspective)
- **Heteroflexible:** people who are usually attracted to the opposite gender/sex to their own, but may occasionally be attracted to people of their own gender/sex (in a view of gender binarism)
- **Bi-curious:** people who usually describe themselves as gay, lesbian, or heterosexual but are curious about the possibility of having a romantic/sexual experience with people of genders/sexes other than their usual preferences

4. **Asexual: a person who does not experience attraction to any gender/sex. An asexual person might have erotic fantasies, feel affection, have relationships, and even engage in sexual behaviour, without necessarily feeling sexual attraction**

2.4 Signs of Gender Dysphoria

As previously mentioned, only some people suffer from a condition that is called Gender Dysphoria.

But what is Gender Dysphoria?

So, first of all, let's say that the word "Dysphoria" comes from the Greek and means "to bear badly" then, literally, Gender Dysphoria means to bear one's gender badly. It is a condition that leads to extreme psychological distress and/or impairment and that drives people who suffer from it to desire a social (clothing, pronouns used to refer to them etc.) and/or are ambiguous about searching somatic (hormonal and/or surgical therapies) gender transition. To summarize, all those whose assigned sex at birth do not match their gender identities could be called transgender, but among them, only people who are diagnosed with Gender Dysphoria suffer markedly from their condition of discrepancy between assigned sex and perceived gender. It's important to note that

not everyone with Gender Dysphoria will experience the same symptoms, and the intensity of these feelings can vary from person to person.

It's fundamental to remember that Gender Dysphoria is a medical condition recognized by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5) and is not a choice or a lifestyle. Supportive and affirming environments, access to healthcare, and counselling can be crucial in helping individuals cope with and alleviate the distress associated with this complex condition.

2.5 Some tips and stories about prejudices and stereotypes

Let's begin by defining what stereotypes actually are. Stereotypes are mental representations of a social group that contain generalized, abstract, rigid knowledge that is resistant to new information. They are global images that describe a group but cancel out individual differences. To apply a stereotype to someone is to attribute the same characteristics to all individuals who belong to a specific category, regardless of whether or not they actually possess those characteristics.



Stereotypes thus act as mental shortcuts that allow us to explain the world around us in a simple way, making it as predictable as possible. You must know, in fact, that the human brain, just like any other kind of machine or tool, needs energy in order to function. You must also know, however, that the brain is designed for its own survival and, as such, will always automatically tend to look for cognitive shortcuts that allow it to reach sufficiently accurate conclusions with as little effort as possible (imagine the brain in perpetual “energy-saving mode”). Stereotypes therefore serve precisely this function as facilitators of understanding the world and savers of effort and energy.

But let’s give examples of stereotypes that relate directly to membership in two particular social groups: sexual genders. Gender stereotypes are part of a system of beliefs and conceptions inherent in male and female identity in relation to personality traits, behavioural traits, and habits that are believed to be appropriate and referable to male and female, respectively. Examples of female gender stereotypes are, for example, that women are particularly emotional, or that they have innate maternal instincts, or the fact that they like handbags and shoes, that they are good at cooking or cleaning the house, that they don’t know how to park the car, and so on. Examples of male gender stereotypes, on the other hand, are, for example, that men are brave and strong, that they like soccer, that they don’t cry, that they are violent and so on. How many of you, male and female, identify with what you have read about your gender? Here, this is to show you how little reliable stereotypes actually are in describing the characteristics of a person and the social group to which he or she belongs. So be very careful about the labels and cognitive shortcuts you use.

Moving forward, there are neutral stereotypes (e.g., “Italians always eat pasta”), positive stereotypes (e.g., “Italians are good at cooking”) and negative stereotypes (e.g., “Italians are lazy and mama’s boys”). In the case of LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and related) people, any kind of stereotyping, whether negative, positive, or neutral, is extremely harmful because it only confirms the belief that lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people are essentially different from heterosexual or cisgender people, thus justifying, albeit for different reasons, discrimination against them. Let’s see some of the most prevalent stereotypes about LGBTIQ+ people:

- Homosexuality/transgenderism is a “choice”
- Homosexuality/transgenderism is the mother’s fault
- Having a homosexual/transgender child is a misfortune
- Homosexuality/transgenderism can be cured

- Homosexuality/transgenderism is “against nature”
- Gays/transgender are immoral, without religion
- Gays are all effeminate and lesbians are all masculine
- Gays are very sensitive
- Gays are all fashionable
- Not all jobs are suitable for homosexual/transgender people
- Lesbians have no maternal sense
- If everyone were homosexual, the species would go extinct
- Children need a daddy and a mommy to grow up well
- Homosexuals who want to have children are paedophiles
- Homosexuals/transgender people are vicious
- Homosexuals/transgender people have unbridled sexuality
- AIDS is the disease of homosexuals
- Homosexuals/transgender people celebrate pride to provoke
- Homosexuals/transgender people are self-ghettoizing
- Homosexuals/transgender people hate heterosexuals/cisgender people
- Homosexuals band together in very powerful political-cultural lobbies
- ...

As you can imagine, the most effective vehicle in conveying stereotypes is language, both spoken language and written language. Listening to and reading, even passively, certain words consistently influence the way we think about the world and the implicit theories we formulate.

So, addressing prejudices and stereotypes is an essential step towards building a more inclusive and equitable society. Here are some tips for addressing and combating these biases:

- **Listen to LGBTIQ+ voices:** seek out and listen to the experiences and stories of LGBTIQ+ individuals. Read books, watch films, and follow LGBTIQ+ activists and influencers on social media to gain insights into their lives.
- **Challenge your own biases:** reflect on your own biases and stereotypes regarding sexual orientation and gender identity. Acknowledge and confront any prejudice you may hold.
- **Use inclusive language:** use language that is inclusive and respectful of diverse gender identities and orientations. Avoid derogatory slurs or terms that may be offensive.

- **Call out stereotypes and prejudice:** when you encounter stereotypes or prejudiced comments about sexual orientation and gender identity, don't stay silent. Politely but firmly challenge these biases and provide factual information when necessary.
- **Create safe spaces:** create and support safe spaces where LGBTIQ+ individuals can express themselves without fear of judgment or discrimination. This can be in your workplace, community, or social circles.
- **Empower and amplify voices:** encourage LGBTIQ+ individuals to share their stories and experiences. Amplify their voices by listening, sharing their stories, and advocating for their rights.
- **Support anti-discrimination policies:** advocate for anti-discrimination policies in your workplace or community that protect LGBTIQ+ individuals from discrimination based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **Promote inclusive education:** encourage the inclusion of LGBTIQ+ history and experiences in educational curricula. Knowledge is a powerful tool for dispelling stereotypes and prejudice.
- **Be patient and persistent:** recognize that change takes time. Be patient and persistent in your efforts to challenge stereotypes and biases. Continue to advocate for inclusivity.
- **Lead by example:** demonstrate inclusive behaviour and attitudes in your interactions with others. Show how to treat LGBTIQ+ individuals with respect and dignity.
- **Engage in dialogue:** initiate open and honest conversations with friends, family, and colleagues about sexual orientation and gender identity. Encourage them to ask questions and learn from one another.

Remember that addressing prejudices and stereotypes is not a one-time effort but an ongoing commitment. By taking these steps, you can contribute to creating a more inclusive and equitable society that respects the dignity and worth of all individuals.

3. How to speak about gender identity and sexual orientation with your child/teen

3.1 How to secure a safe and helpful conversation

As a parent, it's essential to create a safe and open environment where your child/teen feels comfortable discussing their feelings and experiences related to their Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation. Having open, non-judgmental conversations about LGBTIQ+ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer and related) issues with your child/teen can help foster trust, understanding, and support. Here are some tips to ensure a safe and helpful conversation:

1. EDUCATE YOURSELF:

Before engaging in conversation, take the time to educate yourself about LGBTIQ+ issues. Understanding terminology, experiences, and challenges will help you better comprehend your child/teen's perspective.

Read books or guide like this, watch documentaries, and follow reputable websites or organizations dedicated to LGBTIQ+ topics. Knowledge empowers you to be a more supportive parent.

2. CREATE A SAFE SPACE:

Ensure your child/teen feels safe and comfortable discussing their identity with you. Reiterate your love and acceptance, assuring them that you are there to support them.

Emphasize that the conversation is judgment-free, allowing them to express themselves without fear of rejection.

3. LISTEN ACTIVELY:

Give your child/teen your full attention and actively listen when they share their experiences or feelings. Avoid interrupting or offering immediate solutions. Sometimes they just need someone to listen.

4. ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS:

Encourage a dialogue by asking open-ended questions. These questions invite more detailed responses and show that you are genuinely interested in their experiences and perspective.

5. RESPECT PRONOUNS AND IDENTITY:

If your child/teen expresses a particular Gender Identity or pronoun preference, respect and use it. Correcting yourself when you make mistakes shows your commitment to their identity.

6. BE PATIENT:

Understand that your child/teen's journey of self-discovery can be challenging. Be patient and supportive as they navigate their identity and feelings. Don't pressure them to come out or share more than they are comfortable with.

7. ADVOCATE FOR THEIR SAFETY:

Acknowledge the challenges and discrimination that LGBTIQ+ individuals can face. Encourage discussions about their safety and well-being while providing guidance on how to handle potential issues.

8. SEEK PROFESSIONAL SUPPORT:

If you or your child/teen need additional guidance, consider reaching out to therapists or support groups specializing in LGBTIQ+ issues. Professional help can offer valuable insights and coping strategies.

9. ENCOURAGE OPEN COMMUNICATION:

Make it clear that you are available for discussions at any time, and that your child can approach you with questions or concerns. Foster an open channel for communication.

10. CELEBRATE THEIR IDENTITY:

Embrace and celebrate your child/teen's identity. Attend LGBTIQ+ events, pride parades, or local support groups with them to show your solidarity and acceptance.

In general, remember that your child/teen's experience and needs may evolve over time, so maintaining open and supportive communication is an ongoing process. Your love, understanding, and willingness to learn will be a powerful source of strength and comfort for your child/teen as they navigate their identity within the LGBTIQ+ communities.

3.2 The key messages you have to point out

When discussing LGBTIQ+ issues with your child/teen, there are several key messages you should emphasize to ensure understanding, acceptance, and support:

1. **UNCONDITIONAL LOVE AND ACCEPTANCE:** as previously mentioned, let your child/teen know that you love and accept them exactly as they are. Their Gender Identity or Sexual Orientation doesn't change your feelings for them.
2. **RESPECT AND VALIDATION:** emphasize the importance of respecting their identity and feelings. Use their preferred pronouns and any terms or labels they use to describe themselves. Show that you value and validate their experiences.
3. **NO SHAME OR GUILT:** make it clear that there is no reason for them to feel shame or guilt about their identity. They are not doing anything wrong, and you're proud of them for being honest about who they are.

4. **EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT:** offer to educate yourself about LGBTIQ+ issues. This shows that you're committed to understanding their experiences and challenges.
5. **ANTI-BULLYING AND DISCRIMINATION:** address the possibility of bullying and discrimination. Teach them to stand up for themselves and seek help if needed. Encourage them to report any incidents and support them in doing so.
6. **INCLUSIVITY AND RESPECT FOR OTHERS:** discuss the importance of inclusivity and respect for others, regardless of their Sexual Characteristics, Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation. Encourage your child/teen to be kind and supportive of their peers.
7. **ADVOCACY FOR LGBTIQ+ RIGHTS:** explain the significance of advocating for LGBTIQ+ rights and being an ally to the broader community. Show them that they can be a positive force for change.
8. **IDENTITY EXPLORATION:** acknowledge that identity can be a fluid and evolving concept. Support their self-exploration and identity development without pressure or expectations.
9. **BUILDING A SUPPORT NETWORK:** help your child/teen build a support network within the LGBTIQ+ community and among allies. Let them know that they're not alone in their journey.
10. **MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING:** it's never too late to remember to stress the importance of mental and emotional well-being. Encourage them to seek professional help if needed and be a source of emotional support.
11. **POSITIVE ROLE MODELS:** share stories and profiles of successful and happy LGBT individuals who have overcome challenges and found love and acceptance.
12. **AFFIRM THEIR SELF-WORTH:** remind your child/teen that they are valuable and deserving of love and respect just as they are. Their worth is not determined by their gender identity or sexual orientation.
13. **IT'S A JOURNEY:** let your child/teen know that their journey of self-discovery and self-acceptance is unique and personal. Encourage them to embrace it with patience and self-compassion.
14. **YOUR LOVE IS UNCHANGING:** reiterate that your love and support are constant and unwavering, regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation. Your primary concern is their happiness and well-being.

3.3 Speaking about gender roles and stereotypes about sexual orientation

Discussing gender roles and sexual orientation stereotypes with your child/teen is crucial to help them navigate societal expectations and find their authentic selves. Here are some guidelines to ensure a constructive conversation:

1. **CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME AND PLACE:** find a comfortable, private setting where both you and your child/teen feel safe and relaxed. Ensure there are no distractions that may hinder open communication.
2. **DEFINE STEREOTYPES AND GENDER ROLES:** Provide clear explanations of what stereotypes are and how they pertain to both gender roles and sexual orientation. Explain that these stereotypes are societal expectations and do not define a person's identity.
3. **ENCOURAGE YOUR CHILD TO SHARE THEIR THOUGHTS AND EXPERIENCES.** Ask open-ended questions like, "How do you feel about the stereotypes you've encountered?". This allows them to express their feelings without feeling pressured.
4. **SHARE PERSONAL STORIES:** if relevant, share your own experiences with stereotypes and how they influenced your perceptions. This can help your child feel more comfortable opening up.
5. **CHALLENGE STEREOTYPES:** discuss specific stereotypes that are relevant to your child/teen's experiences. Challenge these stereotypes with evidence, real-life examples, and statistics to demonstrate their inaccuracies.
6. **EXPLAIN THE HARM OF STEREOTYPES:** emphasize the harm that stereotypes can cause, not just to the LGBTQ+ communities, but to society as a whole. Help your child understand the importance of breaking free from these constraints.
7. **DISCUSS MEDIA REPRESENTATION:** talk about how media often perpetuates stereotypes and why it's important to critically analyse the portrayals of gender and sexual orientation in movies, TV shows, and advertisements.
8. **HIGHLIGHT ROLE MODELS:** showcase positive role models within the LGBTQ+ communities who have broken stereotypes and succeeded in various fields. This can inspire your child to be confident in their own identity.
9. **ENCOURAGE AUTHENTICITY:** emphasize the importance of being authentic and true to oneself. Your child/teen should know that they don't need to conform to all societal expectations and that they should try to define their own path.

10. **PROMOTE RESPECT FOR OTHERS:** encourage your child/teen to respect the identities and choices of others, even if they don't align with societal norms. This helps in building a more inclusive and accepting society.
11. **STAY INFORMED AND EDUCATED:** commit to staying informed about evolving perspectives on gender and sexual orientation. Share resources and literature with your child/teen to encourage continued learning.
12. **FOSTER CRITICAL THINKING:** teach your child/teen to critically analyse information and question stereotypes. Encourage them to think for themselves and make informed choices about their beliefs and values.
13. **ENCOURAGE SUPPORT NETWORKS:** encourage your child/teen to connect with support networks and allies who can provide guidance and understanding in times of confusion or doubt. If your child is a minor, talk about the opportunities but also the risks in entering groups or venues meant for adults.

End the conversation by reassuring your child/teen of your unconditional love and acceptance, no matter their gender identity or sexual orientation. Remember that this is an ongoing dialogue, and your child/teen's understanding and experiences may evolve over time. By discussing gender roles and stereotypes openly and supportively, you are helping your him/her develop a strong sense of self, resilience, and the ability to challenge societal expectations.

3.4 Some examples in literature for exploring gender identity and sexual orientation

Exploring gender identity and sexual orientation in fiction can be a powerful way to gain insight into these important topics. Here are some examples of fiction, including novels, movies, and TV shows, that delve into these themes:

Novels:

- **“Middlesex” by Jeffrey Eugenides:** this Pulitzer Prize-winning novel the story of Cal Stephanides, an intersex individual who struggles with their identity, gender, and sexuality as they grow up in the United States. The book explores complex family dynamics and societal norms.

- **“Stone Butch Blues” by Leslie Feinberg:** this classic novel follows the life of Jess Goldberg, a stone butch lesbian, and explores the complexities of gender and sexuality in the context of the LGBTIQ+ community.
- **“La mia seconda volta” by Lucrezia Ballardini:** a memoir in which the author shares her experiences and thoughts on her transgender journey, exploring identity and self-acceptance.
- **“Giovanni’s Room” by James Baldwin:** this classic novel explores themes of identity and sexuality through the experiences of the protagonist, David, who grapples with his homosexuality while living in Paris.
- **“Transgender History” by Susan Stryker:** this non-fiction book provides a comprehensive overview of the history of transgender individuals and the LGBTIQ+ movement. It offers insights into the struggles and triumphs of transgender people throughout history.
- **“Call Me by Your Name” by André Aciman:** this novel tells the story of the passionate and romantic relationship between Elio and Oliver during a summer in Italy. It explores themes of Sexual Orientation and self-discovery.
- **“Il Colibrì” by Sandro Veronesi:** this novel tells the story of a transgender character named Colibrì and their journey of self-discovery and acceptance. It delves into the complexities of gender identity.
- **“Red, White & Royal Blue” by Casey McQuiston:** a contemporary LGBTIQ+ romance novel that centres on the romance between the First Son of the United States and the Prince of Wales, challenging stereotypes and expectations.
- **“Fun Home” by Alison Bechdel:** this graphic memoir explores the author’s relationship with her father, her own coming out as a lesbian, and her father’s hidden homosexuality.
- **“Less” by Andrew Sean Greer:** this humorous and heartfelt novel follows the journey of Arthur Less, a struggling novelist, as he travels the world and navigates his own sexual orientation and relationships.
- **“If I Was Your Girl” by Meredith Russo:** a young adult novel that tells the story of Amanda, a transgender girl, as she moves to a new town, attends a new school, and grapples with her identity and the challenges of coming out.
- **“Redefining Realness” by Janet Mock:** in this memoir, Janet Mock shares her personal journey as a transgender woman, providing insights into her experiences and the broader issues faced by the transgender community.

Movies:

- **“Boys Don't Cry”** (1999): This film is based on the real-life story of Brandon Teena, a transgender man, and his struggles with identity, love, and acceptance. It is a powerful exploration of gender and transphobia.
- **“Moonlight”** (2016): This Academy Award-winning film follows the life of a young black man as he grapples with his sexual orientation and identity in a tough Miami neighbourhood.
- **“Carmen y Lola”** (2018): a Spanish drama that portrays the love story between two young Romani women who face societal expectations and discrimination.
- **“The Danish Girl”** (2015): Inspired by the true story of Lili Elbe, one of the first known recipients of sex reassignment surgery, this film explores the complexities of gender identity in the early 20th century.
- **“Tomboy”** (2011): directed by Céline Sciamma, this French film features an Italian character and explores the story of a young transgender boy who takes on a male identity during a summer vacation.
- **“Dallas Buyers Club”** (2013): this film is based on the true story of Ron Woodroof, a heterosexual man who becomes an unlikely advocate for people living with HIV/AIDS, including transgender woman Rayon.
- **“Io e Te”** (Me and You) (2012): directed by Bernardo Bertolucci, this film features a storyline with LGBTIQ+ themes as the protagonist's half-sister comes out as a lesbian.
- **“Milk”** (2008): this biographical film tells the story of Harvey Milk, one of the first openly gay elected officials in the United States, and his efforts to promote LGBTIQ+ rights.
- **“Anna... From the Sky”** (2012): a drama that follows the story of Anna, a transgender woman, as she struggles with societal expectations and discrimination.
- **“Le fate ignoranti”** (His Secret Life) (2001): directed by Ferzan Özpetek, this film explores themes of sexuality, secrets, and identity when a woman discovers her husband's hidden life.
- **“The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert”** (1994): this comedy follows two drag queens and a transgender woman as they travel across the Australian outback in a tour bus.
- **“A Fantastic Woman”** (2017): this Chilean film focuses on a transgender woman who faces discrimination and struggles to assert her identity after her partner's death.

- **“Transamerica”** (2005): this film follows the journey of Bree, a transgender woman, as she reconnects with her estranged son while on a road trip.
- **“Love, Simon”** (2018): this heartwarming coming-of-age film focuses on a high school student, Simon, who is coming to terms with his gay identity. It explores the challenges of coming out to friends and family.
- **“Call Me by Your Name”** (2017): Set in 1980s Italy, this film explores a passionate summer romance between a young man and his father’s research assistant.
- **“Elisa & Marcela”** (2019): a historical drama film directed by Isabel Coixet, based on the true story of two women who entered into a same-sex marriage in Spain in the early 20th century.
- **“Pride”** (2014): this British film tells the story of a group of LGBTIQ+ activists who supported striking coal miners in the 1980s, demonstrating the power of solidarity and unity.
- **“A escondidas”** (Hidden Away) (2014): a coming-of-age film that follows the story of two teenage boys who navigate their feelings for each other while dealing with family and societal expectations.
- **“The Fishbowl”** (2018): directed by Stefanos Kalesis, this drama follows a transgender woman and her struggles with acceptance, both within her family and society.
- **“Carol”** (2015): this romantic drama follows the relationship between an aspiring photographer and an older woman in 1950s New York, exploring themes of love and societal expectations.
- **“The Half of It”** (2020): this coming-of-age film follows a high school student, Ellie Chu, who helps a jock woo a girl they both secretly love. It explores themes of sexual orientation, friendship, and self-discovery.

TV Shows:

- **“Transparent”** (Amazon Prime Video): this series revolves around the Pfefferman family and their experiences with gender identity and sexuality. It provides a deep exploration of these themes within a family context.
- **“Pose”** (FX): set in the 1980s ball culture of New York City, this series explores the lives of transgender individuals and the LGBTIQ+ community, addressing themes of identity, acceptance, and resilience.
- **“The Path of Support”**: a drama series that features a transgender character and explores their journey and challenges.

- **“Euphoria”** (HBO): the show features several characters exploring their sexual orientation and gender identity, touching on issues faced by modern teenagers.
- **“One Day You’ll Take My Daughter”**: a Greek series that explores the complexities of LGBTIQ+ relationships within a family setting.
- **“Schitt’s Creek”** (Netflix/Amazon Prime Video): this comedy series features a pansexual character, David Rose, and explores themes of acceptance and self-discovery.
- **“Skam Italia”**: an Italian adaptation of the Norwegian series “Skam”, it addresses various teenage issues, including LGBTIQ+ themes.
- **“One Day at a Time”** (Netflix): this sitcom follows the daily life of a Cuban-American family and includes storylines related to LGBTIQ+ identity and acceptance, particularly centered around the character Elena.
- **“Sex Education”** (Netflix): set in a British high school, this series explores various topics related to sex, relationships, and sexual orientation.
- **“Helios”**: a drama series that addresses LGBTIQ+ themes, focusing on the lives and relationships of a group of young adults.
- **“Veneno”**: a biographical series based on the life of transgender icon Cristina Ortiz Rodríguez, better known as La Veneno.
- **“Queer Eye”** (Netflix): this reality TV series features the “Fab Five”, who provide makeovers and life advice to individuals of various backgrounds, emphasizing acceptance and self-empowerment.
- **“Gentleman Jack”** (BBC/HBO): this historical drama series is based on the life of Anne Lister, a 19th-century English landowner and lesbian. It explores her relationships and challenges during a time when LGBTIQ+ identities were not openly acknowledged.
- **“It’s a Sin”** (HBO Max): this drama series follows a group of friends in the 1980s as they navigate the AIDS epidemic in the United Kingdom.
- **“Feel Good”** (Netflix): this British comedy-drama series explores the life of a comedian named Mae, who identifies as non-binary and is in a same-sex relationship.
- **“Special”** (Netflix): this series follows a gay man with cerebral palsy as he embarks on a journey of self-discovery and independence.

These examples of fiction offer a range of perspectives on gender identity and sexual orientation, providing valuable insights and opportunities for reflection. They can be a starting point for discussions with your child/teen, encouraging empathy, understanding, and support for individuals navigating these aspects of their lives.

4. Your child comes out: what do you have to do?

4.1 Coming out: basic meaning

“Coming out” is a profound and often transformative process in which individuals reveal a deeply personal aspect of their identity to others (friends, family, co-workers etc.). While this can encompass any concealed truth or revelation, it is most commonly associated with the experience of LGBTIQ+ individuals, when they choose to disclose their non heterosexuality and/or their non cisgender identity. The expression “coming out” is derived from a longer English expression: “Coming out of the closet”, this act of self-disclosure is profoundly personal and, for many, it is a defining moment in their lives.¹

The coming out process often has several stages, from disclosure to one person or a few intimates, to total openness with respect to one’s orientation/gender identity. For many, coming-out to everyone is perceived as a full realisation of their personal identity. But for other – especially people who live in a restrictive community – a partial coming-out to “safe” people may strike a better balance when you don’t want to lose all connection with such communities.

¹ Be careful not to confuse “coming out” with “outing”! These two words are often mistakenly used interchangeably, but as much as they are two similar words, they absolutely don’t mean the same thing! Indeed, “outing” is used to identify the damaging process by which a person tells someone about someone else’s non heterosexuality and/or non cisgender identity, without the person concerned knowing and agreeing to it.

The first coming-out is the one you do to yourself, without which all other “external” coming-outs would not be possible. It is necessary in the meantime to be aware of one’s emotions and attraction to a person of the same sex (and/or of one’s non belonging to the gender assigned at birth). So, summarizing, coming out means deeply affirming one’s identity, first of all to oneself, and then to other significative people.

Coming out as an LGBTIQ+ person is an act of courage and self-affirmation. It’s about embracing one’s authentic self and sharing it with others. This process can be both empowering and challenging, as it involves navigating societal expectations, stereotypes, and, at times, discrimination. There is no one-size-fits-all approach to coming out. It’s a highly individual process that varies from person to person. Some individuals start by confiding in close friends or family members, while others may choose to share their truth more broadly, such as through social media. The timing and manner of coming out are personal decisions, and they often reflect the individual’s unique circumstances and comfort level. LGBTIQ+ individuals come out for various reasons; some do it to foster understanding, acceptance, and support from their loved ones, while others come out to challenge stereotypes and promote social change. It’s an act of self-liberation, freeing individuals from the weight of concealing their true selves. However, it’s essential to recognize that coming out can be met with a range of reactions. Many persons respond with love and support, offering their understanding and solidarity. Yet, others may have difficulty comprehending or may hold biases and prejudices. Unfortunately, some individuals may encounter discrimination, rejection, or hostility when they come out.

Many LGBTIQ+ people tend not to coming out, or at least to keep it private in certain circles, for fear of being harmed by this revelation: this is the case with adolescents from very strict families or individuals who study/work in very conservative environments. Some choose not even to tell their friends for fear of rejection! But more specifically, what factors may hinder coming out within the family?

- **Social homophobia**
- **Internalized homophobia**
- **Conservative political Orientation**
- **Very religious environment**

An additional obstacle to coming out may be the negative consequences associated with the increased visibility and exposure that would result from it, from both personal and social perspectives, like discrimination and feelings of victimization and/or bullying

at school. Homophobia and bullying (which we will discuss later) therefore can make the coming-out process more difficult and lead the person to become increasingly withdrawn.

What, on the other hand, can be factors that may favour the choice to come out?

- **Having LGBT friends**
- **Being within a stable relationship**
- **Growing up in open and accepting environments**

And what are the positive effects of coming out? Acceptance and integration of homosexual/non cisgender identity within one's life promotes personal well-being and mental and physical health, as well as increased self-esteem, quality of life and job satisfaction, reduced levels of anxiety, depression, anger and sense of loneliness.

It is a fairly common experience for LGBTIQ+ people to be asked if and when they have come out. In reality, such a question hides within itself a basic error, which is to consider coming out a one-time event. Indeed, there are many coming out! The modes of self-disclosure will change as the person becomes aware of and accepts his/her sexual identity. Over time, explicit communication will be less and less necessary and more implicit ways of coming out will be adopted. The prerequisite is that the person is aware of who they are and accepts their sexual identity.

What is important to say, in general, is that creating a more inclusive and accepting environment for LGBTIQ+ individuals is crucial. This requires advocating for equal rights, fighting against discrimination, and promoting education and awareness. Everyone deserves the freedom to come out without fear of discrimination or harm, and society plays a crucial role in making this a reality. The act of coming out is a testament to the resilience, strength, and authenticity of LGBTIQ+ individuals. It highlights the importance of creating a world where diversity is celebrated, and all can live openly and honestly, irrespective of their sexual orientation or gender identity. It is a reminder that love and acceptance should be the norm, enabling individuals to flourish as their true selves.

4.2 What happens in your child's mind

During childhood, the biggest problem is definitely the lack of psychic means of coping, the fact that often there is a lack of comparison, models of positive identification. Suffice it to say that in all fairy tales the princess waits for the prince. No "differences" are provided. That is why, for some years now, children's readings without social and/or gender stereotypes (or critically reflecting on them) have been written and published, in order to offer possibilities for positive identification to all individuals, not only to those who collimate with the dominant norm. Similarly, films, TV shows, web-series, and fiction for adolescents and young people today enable more of the expansion of a cultural imaginary by narrating homo-bisexuality and gender variance as possibilities worthy of value, recognition, and respect.

During adolescence, the individual has more psychic tools than a child to cope with the situation, but it is still a very confusing of life, in which one goes through great changes, both physical as well as psychological and social. Coming out is a real task of development specifically for non-heterosexual/non cisgender adolescents.

I report below the testimony of a young man who can help to better understand what may be going on in the mind of individuals who realize that they are homosexual and is confronted with the idea of coming out. Testimonies like this one, and like many others, help to understand things better than many theories, since they force the reader to put aside prejudice and confront real experience, which makes us authentically get in touch with the other and makes us better able to relate to those who appear different from us.

"When you find out, still a young boy, you are used to seeing a happy man and woman everywhere and you feel different, lonely, wrong.... At first you try not to think about it, then the first sexual longing begins to take hold.... You no longer dream of a happy life. You try hard to look like them, but you can't, and in a moment of pure rage, when you find yourself alone in a room and with nothing you can do to control yourself, an anger you've never felt before takes hold of you. You would like to scream, but something like a brake put on you from within prevents you from doing so; negative thoughts crowd your mind and suppressed anger turns into despair, but the fear of being betrayed prevents you from asking for help and, like a condemned man, you realize that that burden will always be a part of you. Days pass, but the situation does not change. The only thing you can do is not to amplify the natural mistake you feel until you meet a guy.... You meet him on the Internet or maybe it's just the result of a glance cast around and subsequently corresponded. Temptation and

desire take hold of you and without thinking about it you let go, tired of all the constant repression that has become your very life. Caresses and exchanges of glances are not there, you only notice the presence of an incredible and uncontrolled eagerness that has taken possession of you. You grasp the object of desire for the first time, the eagerness and excitement skyrocket and, without you realizing it, the excitement ends. It may be immediately or after a few seconds, but you cannot help but realize what you have done. Suddenly, after a seeming peace, the fear you never wanted to come out of you goes to your head.... Some people get dressed quickly and run away, hoping that this will erase what happened; some people cry pushing away their one-night partner; some go so far as to threaten.... Even to suicide. All for not being able to admit what one is and simultaneously its opposite: homosexual and homophobic. You choose to run away, and if you're lucky the other person doesn't blow the whistle on you. You arrive home without being able to look anyone in the eye, ignore your mother's call for dinner, answer that you want to get some sleep if anyone asks, and lock yourself in your room, weak and exhausted by the craziest thoughts mixed with a strange and irrational sense of guilt. Tears of what you are, of anger at those who birthed you this way, of self-hatred, of despair at not being able to ask for help, of sadness because there is nothing left to do. As time goes by, some take a year, some ten, a self-acceptance mechanism is established within you that allows you to live with this burden. Then you begin to live yourself, albeit secretly, in a place where you discover others like you, people hiding, fucking each other without asking each other's names and maybe without even seeing each other's faces. You live two different lives, dictated by the day where you are a boy still going to school or father with a family, and by the night where the real you is released in an uncontrolled way, where you step out of the shoes of the other you. One day, however, in a world that you consider perverse and the paradise/hell of lust, you meet a boy or a man who turns your head, who takes you from within. You begin to change your mind about homosexuality, together you build a relationship and, finally or unfortunately, you find the courage to tell your parents. Old fears resurface, you realize that an even bigger change than the previous one is taking place, whether you are a student or a man in your 30s or more. You are too afraid, something paralyzes you again, even though you thought you were psychologically prepared. When you find yourself alone with your mother and father, you feel as if you are being judged in court, as if your very life depends on it, and when you least expect it, you say those fateful words: I'm gay! Some parents cry, others yell, say words that hurt you, make you feel lousy, and tell you those things that you were telling yourself. Then a voice at your side, when everything seems over, says you are engaged: immediately you remember why you chose to be yourself, not to be a husband unfaithful and sad, married to a devoted woman in love horribly unaware of the situation she has put herself in. Find the courage to do anything, be yourself from then on, because others will

always doubt you if you are not the first to be sure of yourself. Proud of who you are, always walk tall."

Each individual's experience is unique; some common feelings and thoughts that may occur:

- **Fear:** coming out can be a terrifying experience. LGBTIQ+ individuals often fear rejection, discrimination, or negative reactions from their loved ones. They may also worry about the impact on their relationships with family members.
- **Relief:** after coming out, there is often a sense of relief that accompanies being honest about their identity. It can be a weight lifted from their shoulders, as they no longer have to hide a significant part of themselves.
- **Vulnerability:** sharing something deeply personal and important can make individuals feel vulnerable. They are essentially opening up their hearts and minds to their loved ones and hoping for acceptance and support.
- **Anxiety:** anxiety may be present due to the uncertainty of how family members will react. This anxiety can persist even after coming out, as they wait for responses and reactions.
- **Honesty:** many people feel a profound sense of honesty and authenticity when they come out. They are finally able to be themselves and share their true identity with the people they care about.
- **Hope:** there is often hope for understanding, acceptance, and love from their family. This hope may be mixed with anxiety about how their family will react.
- **Anticipation:** they may anticipate questions, concerns, or confusion from their family members and be prepared to address them.
- **Doubt:** some individuals may doubt their decision to come out or question whether it was the right time or approach. This self-doubt is common as they navigate their new reality.
- **Empowerment:** for many, coming out is an act of empowerment. It's a step toward living openly and authentically, and it's an assertion of their identity.
- **Education:** LGBTIQ+ individuals may feel a responsibility to educate their family about their Sexual orientation or gender identity, which can require patience and understanding.

It's essential to remember that every coming-out experience is unique, and the emotional responses of sons and daughters can vary widely. Some may experience immediate acceptance and support, while others may face challenges and need time to work through their family's reactions. Open and honest communication, empathy, and

support from family members can greatly influence the overall experience and the emotional journey of the person coming out.

4.3 They speak with you (parent) and what you can (have to) say

When a son or daughter comes out as LGBTIQ+, it is a pivotal moment in their lives. As a parent, your response can greatly impact your child's emotional well-being and the strength of your relationship. Here are some important things to consider and say when your child comes out:

- **Thank them for trusting you:** coming out can be an incredibly vulnerable experience, so thank your child for trusting you with this personal aspect of their life. Let them know that you are honoured by their honesty.
- **Ask questions (with sensitivity):** encourage open dialogue by asking questions, but do so with sensitivity. Make sure your questions come from a place of curiosity and a genuine desire to understand, rather than making your child feel like they need to educate you.
- **Respect their privacy:** remember that your child/teen's coming out is their story to share, and they may not be ready to disclose it to everyone. Respect their privacy and let them decide who else to share this information with.
- **Advocate for them:** make it clear that you are their advocate and ally. Offer your support in any way you can, whether it's helping them navigate challenging situations or being there as a source of strength.
- **Affirm their identity:** acknowledge and affirm their identity. If your child has come out as transgender, use their preferred name and pronouns. Respect their self-identification and treat them accordingly.
- **Offer unconditional support:** reiterate your support in times of difficulty. LGBTIQ+ individuals may still face discrimination or prejudice. Knowing they have your support can be a source of comfort and strength.
- **Give it time:** understand that the coming-out process is ongoing, and it may take time for both you and your child to fully adjust. Be patient and allow your relationship to evolve as you both navigate this new aspect of their identity.

In essence, your response to your child/teen coming out should be rooted in love, acceptance, and understanding. It's an opportunity to strengthen your bond and show your child/teen that you are committed to their happiness and well-being, regardless of their sexual orientation or gender identity. Your words and actions can make a world of difference in helping your child/teen feel safe, supported, and loved.

4.4 How you (parent) can (have to) do for helping them

Even today parents do not have enough information about non heterosexuality and gender identity in general, they probably do not know other non-heterosexual/non cisgender people, and what they think is often the result of prejudice, stereotypes, and naivety. There is fear for the safety of the son or daughter. One worries that they may lose all of their friends, one fears that they may be subjected to insults or violence, one imagines that someone may have circuited them and influenced them negatively, one also fears for their health, primarily one fears that they may lead a dissolute life such that they risk contracting HIV and then developing AIDS. There is a belief that they will not succeed in life, difficulty in finding work, and certainly will not have a career. One imagines that the son or daughter can never be a happy person. One asks oneself a thousand questions. What is non heterosexuality/non cisgender identity? Why is someone non heterosexual/non cisgender? What is non heterosexual/non cisgender people like? What life do they lead, what relationships do they form, what existence will they have, what circles do they frequent? What friends do they make? And most importantly, "Who is my son? Who is my daughter?". The person you thought you knew does not exist anymore. The son or daughter is gone. Then the feelings of guilt can come: still wondering what educational mistakes may have been the cause of the son's or daughter's non heterosexuality/non cisgender identity, thinking that they did not do enough, overlooked important details, did not notice in time to remedy. Sometimes one regrets not having grasped the suffering and discomfort and having left the son or daughter alone in the difficult, albeit challenging, self-discovery. A sense of shame can also take over. Non heterosexuality/non cisgender identity may be socially perceived as a negative condition, to be condemned, which "infects" the whole family. One's own family, the one of which until a moment before one was so proud, appears sick, carrying an unhealthy element. Parents may feel uneasy at the idea that others (neighbours, near or distant relatives, family friends, co-workers) may begin to think of them as bad

educators. One can feel discomfort and anxiety at the idea of meeting and getting to know other non-heterosexual/non cisgender people. One may think of them as strange people; imagining dealing with them is embarrassing, even if they are friends of one's son or daughter. Even worse if it is their partner. Even the inevitable thought of sexuality and the meeting of bodies arouses embarrassment or revulsion. Finally, there can be grief. There is the belief that being non heterosexual/non cisgender means being deprived of dignity and rights, that one's sons and daughters will not be able to demonstrate their loves in public, even walking hand in hand, much less enjoy together with their partner the pleasure of a candlelight dinner. Let us not even mention the project and the right to start a family and have children! For parents, the dream of having grandchildren is thus shattered! Fear, guilt, shame, discomfort, anxiety, embarrassment, revulsion, and pain are feelings that in many cases sons and daughters have also experienced while discovering their sexual orientation. Like them, parents also need time, effort, deepening and confrontation before regaining balance and serenity in family relationships. It is a real journey, which for some parents can be quick, for others, on the other hand, can seem interminable, difficult, full of obstacles, and for still others never ending. Unfortunately, in fact, some parents pretend not to know, don't talk about it, avoid getting involved in their son's or daughter's life, refuse to get to know their partners and friends, and this has strong repercussions not only on their own serenity and that of their son or daughter, but also, of course, on their relationship, which, left so deprived of all confidences, loses its meaning and warmth.

But it must be remembered that as one enters the tunnel, one can get out. After an initial period of disorientation, one may feel the need of seeking help. Comparison with other parents who have already gone through a similar experience can be important at this stage. One's son or daughter's non heterosexuality/non cisgender identity is slowly no longer perceived negatively. The family expands to include the son's or daughter's partner and, when there are, also the children born into their families. One begins to find first the courage and then the peace of mind to communicate to others that one's son/daughter is non heterosexual/non homosexual. One finds pride in them, in how they have been able to be honest with themselves and strong in claiming their right to respect and happiness. Some parents embrace their children's causes and begin to advocate for a more inclusive society and to help other parents still struggling. Eventually the thought arises, "Straight or gay, what difference does it make? You're still you!".

Some specific practical advice if you have a transgender child may relate to managing clothing, possible initial medical therapies, bathrooms and dress rooms choice at school.

- **First, is advisable, at home, to let your transgender child dress in a manner that they feel most comfortable and that aligns with their gender identity.** Respecting your child's clothing choices can be an important aspect of supporting their well-being and mental health. Clothing can be a form of self-expression and a way for individuals to affirm their gender identity. Transgender children often face challenges related to self-identity, social acceptance, and the validation of their gender identity. Allowing them to express themselves through their clothing choices can be empowering and affirming. It sends a message of love, acceptance, and support, which is crucial for their emotional and psychological well-being.
- **Second, the first medical treatment to manage gender dysphoria in childhood is the use of puberty blockers** (before that, the only recommended therapies are psychological to manage the stress and suffering resulting from this condition). The use of puberty blockers (puberty inhibitors) for a transgender child is a decision that should be made in consultation with healthcare professionals who specialize in transgender health, along with your child and their mental and physical well-being in mind. Here are some important considerations:
 - **Consult with healthcare professionals:** reach out to healthcare professionals, such as paediatric endocrinologists and gender specialists, who can provide guidance and expertise on the use of puberty blockers for your child. They will assess your child's individual needs and make recommendations based on their physical and psychological development.
 - **Age and development:** puberty blockers are typically considered for transgender children who have entered the early stages of puberty and who are experiencing significant distress related to the development of secondary sexual characteristics that do not align with their gender identity. The timing may vary from child to child.
 - **Reversibility:** puberty blockers are considered a reversible treatment. If your child begins taking them and later decides not to proceed with further gender-affirming treatments, the effects of puberty will resume. This

allows your child time to explore their gender identity without committing to irreversible changes.

- **Mental and emotional health:** assess your child's mental and emotional well-being. If your child is experiencing significant distress or emotional challenges related to their pubertal development, puberty blockers may help alleviate some of these concerns.
- **Long-term plans:** discuss your child's long-term goals for their gender transition with healthcare professionals. Puberty blockers can provide time for your child to explore their gender identity and make informed decisions about potential future treatments, such as hormone therapy.
- **Parental support:** ensure you have a strong support system for your child, including family, friends, and professionals who can help guide you through the decision-making process and provide emotional support.
- **Informed consent:** make sure your child understands the potential benefits and risks of puberty blockers and that their decision is informed and based on their feelings and needs.

Ultimately, the decision to use puberty blockers for your transgender child is a highly individual one. It is important to prioritize your child's well-being, involve healthcare professionals, and provide a supportive and informed environment for your child to express their gender identity and make decisions about their healthcare.

- **Third, the choice of the dressing room/bathroom for a transgender child at school should prioritize the child's comfort and safety.** The decision should align with the child's gender identity and may depend on the school's policies and practices. Here are some considerations:
 - **Gender-affirming choice:** whenever possible, it is advisable to allow transgender students to use the dressing room/bathroom that corresponds to their gender identity. This allows them to feel comfortable, affirmed, and respected.
 - **Privacy options:** many schools have adopted inclusive policies that offer options such as a private changing area or the use of a restroom or locker room/bathroom that aligns with the student's gender identity. These options can provide privacy and a sense of safety.
 - **Respect and dignity:** regardless of the choice, it's crucial to ensure that the child is treated with respect and dignity by both school staff and fellow

students. Any teasing, harassment, or discrimination should be addressed promptly.

- **Communication:** work closely with the school administration to discuss your child's needs and preferences. Open and respectful communication can help ensure a supportive solution that meets your child's needs.
- **Safety and well-being:** prioritize your child's safety and well-being. If your child has concerns about using a particular changing room/bathroom, discuss these concerns with the school and explore alternative options.
- **Educate and advocate:** encourage the school to educate students and staff about transgender issues and foster a culture of acceptance and inclusion. Advocate for the rights of transgender students to use facilities that align with their gender identity.
- **Legal protections:** familiarize yourself with the legal protections and policies in your area that support transgender students' rights. Use these laws to advocate for your child's rights if necessary.

Remember that the experience of transgender students may vary depending on the school's policies and the broader cultural context. The goal is to create a safe and inclusive environment where your child can feel affirmed and supported in their gender identity. Working closely with the school and seeking guidance from organizations specializing in LGBTIQ+ issues can be helpful in achieving this goal.

4.5 They do not speak with you (parent) but they find another confident (friends, other adults...) and happens to you (parent) to know that by chance

If you find out about your child's LGBTIQ+ identity through sources other than them personally coming out to you, it's essential to approach the situation with sensitivity and understanding. Here's what you can do:

- **Stay calm:** when you learn about your child's LGBTIQ+ identity, it's crucial to remain calm and composed. Your initial reaction should reflect openness and willingness to discuss the matter.
- **Respect their privacy:** while you may have learned about your child's identity without their direct disclosure, respect their privacy and autonomy. They might have had their reasons for not coming out to you.
- **Initiate a conversation:** express your love and support for your child and let them know that you are here to listen and understand. You can say something like, "I heard about your identity, and I want you to know that I love you and support you. We can talk about it when you're ready."
- **Avoid accusations:** avoid making accusatory statements or asking questions like, "Why didn't you tell me?". Instead, focus on creating a safe and welcoming space for discussion.
- **Listen actively:** when your child does decide to talk, listen actively and with empathy. Understand that they may have felt apprehensive about coming out to you and be open to their experiences.
- **Respect their timing:** your child may not be ready to have a full conversation right away. Be patient and allow them to open up at their own pace.
- **Connect with LGBTIQ+ organizations:** seek out LGBTIQ+ organizations in your community or online. They can provide guidance and resources for both you and your child.
- **Advocate for their rights:** become an advocate for your child within your family and community. Stand up against discrimination and support their rights.
- **Maintain open communication:** continue to encourage open communication with your child. Make sure they know they can come to you with any concerns or questions.

Remember that the most important thing is to show your love, acceptance, and support for your child. Your response can significantly impact their emotional well-being and the strength of your relationship. Your willingness to have an open and understanding conversation is a step toward fostering a trusting and supportive connection with your child.

5. Your child decides to Not come Out: What kind of support can you give?

5.1 What should you (parent) do?

What everyone can try to do is to depower the fear of diversity: to show that differences can be a resource and that welcoming and respecting them basically means recognizing the fundamental and positive right that every human being has to express his/her own originality. Education for knowledge of the other, understood in this sense, is therefore a necessary tool for promoting a culture of human rights made up of respect and recognition of one's own and others' differences. You do not have to force your children in any way to come out, which as we have already seen is an entirely personal, complex, long and often difficult process. What you can do is try to raise them in an open and accepting environment, as free as possible from harmful stereotypes and prejudices about non heterosexuality and transgenderism. Avoid making assumptions about your child's identity. Remember that it is their path that defines who they are, and that it may not conform to societal norms or your expectations. Keep in mind that each person's path is unique and that the most important thing is to provide your child with a safe and loving space to be themselves. When your child is ready, he will share his/her truth with you. In the meantime, focus on building a strong and trusting relationship with them.

Ultimately, it's essential to remember that your child's well-being is what matters most. By creating an environment of love, acceptance, and open communication, you can help

your child feel safe and supported. They may choose to come out at their own pace or may decide not to come out at all, and that's okay. Your unconditional love and understanding will make a significant difference in their life.

5.2 Homophobia and transphobia: what are the obstacles

Homophobia/transphobia are that set of thoughts, ideas, opinions that provoke emotions such as anxiety, disgust, discomfort, anger, hostility toward non heterosexual/non cisgender people, we can define them as the irrational fear, intolerance and hatred of these categories of people, and they are often conveyed by the main institutions of our society, such as schools, the state and the church².

The key information is that you are not born homophobic/transphobic, but you become one! So, long before we have a real understanding of what the word homosexuality/transgenderism means, we inherit from a homophobic/transphobic culture, the belief that being non heterosexual/non cisgender is something absolutely wrong, unnatural and contrary to the norms of common living.

Fear of "different" is something ingrained in the human soul. Throughout the history of the world, it has happened many times that individuals or social groups who differed from the dominant majority (by skin colour, religious belief, gender etc.) have been victims of oppressive phenomena, an attitude of distrust or contempt. Of course, as with other forms of prejudice (racism and sexism in particular), a major factor for an individual to be homophobic/transphobic is constituted by a personal component of closed-mindedness and rigidity.

All personal and societal beliefs that are contrary to non-heterosexuality/transgenderism, such as that non heterosexuality/transgenderism is pathological, immoral, against nature, socially dangerous or disabling, or the non-sharing the social and legal claims of people who are non-heterosexual/non cisgender are considered manifestation of homophobia/transphobia. Homophobia/transphobia

² A small parenthesis should be opened here because, in fact, the terms "homophobia/transphobia" has been criticized by some, because indeed the phenomena to which they want to refer does not really meet the clinical characteristics of a phobia; it would be more correct to speak then of "homonegativity/trans negativity", but these terms are much less widespread and using them would risk confusion. So, even among ourselves, let's continue to talk about "homophobia/transphobia".

can also manifest themselves through discriminatory behaviour in the workplace, in institutions, at school or on the street, with acts of physical and psychological violence (beatings, insults, mistreatment). All this testifies to the difficulty that many people and groups have in dealing with their own prejudices, suspicions, and bad faith toward other human beings. However, it is clear that it is not necessary to go as far as insults to hurt LGBTIQ+ people. Sometimes even in common speech one can express homophobia/transphobia, and be offensive. Let's give some examples:

- **Are you gay? I have some doubts... but are you really sure? It doesn't show at all!**
- **Are you a lesbian? Eh, it's just a moment, a phase! You'll see that when you meet the right man you will like him, rest assured!**
- **The world is made up of women and men.**
- **Marriage can only be done between people of different sexes.**
- **Are you a homosexual/non cisgender? Nobody is perfect!**
- **I have gay friends and I have no problem! But woe if they touch me!**
- **You don't need to call yourself a lesbian! You'd better keep it to yourself!**
- **I'm glad you told me about your homosexuality, but I'll advice: don't tell anyone!**
- **That gays, lesbians and transsexuals get engaged is fine with me, but that they want to become a family like us normal... that seems to me exaggerated!**
- **That's a good teacher, even if she is a lesbian.**
- **Are you gay/non cisgender? Well, all things considered there are bigger problems!**
- **You are my son. I still love you!**

What emerges from all these sentences is the idea that non heterosexuality/transgenderism and being a non-heterosexual/non-cisgender person constitute a "problem", something that would be preferable if it were not there. But how can I, if I am a non-heterosexual and/or transgender person, or if my son or daughter is, not feel offended, despised, unwanted, unloved in hearing these

sentences, in which I am told that it would have been better if I not been there, or that my son or daughter did not exist?

Homophobia/transphobia are common, are the result of misinformation, prejudice, or personal conflict, and arise from the idea that the “natural” and “normal” world is governed exclusively by heterosexual relationships, while everything else should be considered deviant. Any experiences of discrimination and violence associated with homophobia/transphobia and even the perception of being rejected by society and loved ones because of one’s sexual orientation and/or gender nonconforming identity cause some people to experience stress that marks their psychological development in a sometimes-traumatic way. In fact, they are to be traced back to these dimensions of stress and grief many of the depressive states, guilt, sexual problems, substance abuse, and suicidal thoughts or attempts that unfortunately sometimes mark the lives of non-heterosexual/non cisgender people. The stigma and sense of vulnerability to which non heterosexual/transgender adolescents are exposed can lead, in many cases, to a progressive decline in self-esteem and socialization skills, as well as to an increased concern for their own safety.

But let’s take it a step further and see what is meant by interiorized homophobia/transphobia. We speak of internalized homophobia/transphobia when a non-heterosexual/non cisgender person experiences negative feelings, such as anxiety, contempt and aversion, toward non heterosexuality/transgenderism, their own and/or others’. As you can well imagine, this is an extremely impactful condition for the individual and can cause considerable psychological distress. In our society, given the degree of social homophobia/transphobia that surrounds us, homophobic/transphobic attitudes on the part of non-heterosexual/non cisgender people at some time in their lives are unfortunately recurrent. So, we can say that non heterosexual/non cisgender person come to have negative feelings toward non heterosexuality/transgenderism simply by passively accepting all the prejudices, behaviours, and discriminatory views typical of the culture in which we are born and raised. The emotions experienced by these people are mainly fear, dread, shame and guilt, and these feelings are largely due to social prejudice and internalized homonegativity/trans negativity. All of these feelings of discomfort can lead people (especially young people) to hide or deny their sexual orientation/gender identity, constantly selecting information to give to others (e.g., inventing an alternative erotic-affectional or heterosexual/cisgender life, omitting salient information etc.) and thus making a great deal of effort at the cognitive and behavioural levels; they may hide or even assume a heterosexual/cisgender identity in

public. All of this, of course, brings with it numerous problems related to low self-esteem, constant anxiety, frustration, and even real depressive feelings. Also because of this, individuals with high levels of internalized homophobia/transphobia are less likely to come out to their family members.

5.3 Useful parenting practices

If your son/daughter asks you, “In your opinion, am I gay? Am I a lesbian?”, try to think that the question is actually a different one, namely, “Even if I were gay, lesbian or bisexual, or should I come to the realization of a transgender identity or want to express myself in a sense that does not conform to traditional gender norms, can I continue to have a good relationship with you? Will my being homosexual (bisexual, transgender etc.) cause me to lose my friendships?”. In answering, one must take into consideration the fact that a non-hetero identity or gender nonconforming expression is not a disabling condition and that consequently it is not true that it would be preferable not to be one.

Let’s list again some possible wrong answers:

- **“It may be a phase;** having had experiences with people of the same sex does not mean being homosexual.”. Although giving such answers gives the feeling of appeasement, in fact the message is being passed that such a condition is really undesirable, thus multiplying the fears the adolescent is experiencing about his/her orientation.
- **“You were right to tell me, but don’t tell others (parents, peers).”.** This gives the impression that being non heterosexual/non cisgender is bad and therefore this condition should be kept hidden. Instead, consider with the person the ways and timing of his/her coming out.
- **“How do you know?** Maybe you haven’t found the right person for you yet and you haven’t yet tried sexual relations with the opposite sex!”. The drives, attractions, and affections we feel are an expression of our identity and guide our behaviours. It is not behaviours that define our identity, so it is not having relationships with the opposite sex that will make us a heterosexual person. That is why it is important to give credit to a boy or girl who claims to be homosexual.
- **“You are too young to make such a big choice!”.** Non heterosexuality/transgenderism is not a choice!

- **“Forget it, you have more important things right now to focus on!”**. The moment of coming out is very difficult and painful: acceptance of one’s homosexuality (or other) is accompanied by the fear that the quality of one’s life may change for the worse, as well as friendship or family relationships. So, never minimize, underestimate, discredit or invalidate this moment!
- **“I would never have said that! It just doesn’t show!”**. Do not reinforce stereotypes about how non heterosexual/non cisgender people are supposed to be or should behave!

Let’s now look at some correct responses:

- **“No problem!”**. Communicate the message that whatever his/her sexual orientation/gender identity, the relationship with him/her will not fail.
- **“What are the things that worry you?”**. Leave it to him/her to define his/her fears, without attempting a hasty interpretation.
- **“Do you think you need my help?”**. Give your willingness and offer your support at this time, but let him/her tell you what he/she wants and what, if anything, he/she needs.
- **“Telling me may not have been easy, now though, we need to find you a partner!”**. It is important to acknowledge with empathy the difficulties of his/her coming out. At the same time, trying with a joke to downplay it, making constructive references to his/her emotional and sexual life, is helpful and allows the person to assert his/her right to be who he/she is and to be happy in love.
- **“You are not the only person in the world, and although it may be difficult to get adequate information at school, there are associations that can help and support you.”**. Let them know that they are not alone.

And now some advice to parents who learn about their son/daughter’s non heterosexuality/transgenderism:

- If your son or daughter is non heterosexual/non cisgender, it is not because of you. sexual orientation/gender identity is a stable component of sexual identity, so it cannot be changed.
- Your son/daughter did not choose his/her sexual orientation/gender identity, cannot change it in any way, and is not sick. He/she simply belongs to that set of people who love people of the same sex-gender or who do not identify with the gender assigned at birth.

- Among all, the one who has suffered the most is he/she and, until now, has done so in total solitude. Side with him/her and confirm your love for him/her, because he/she is still the son/daughter he was before.
- Non heterosexual love has equal dignity to exist as heterosexual love and like heterosexual love requires visibility, space, confidences and words. Don't play dumb, but explore your son/daughter's emotional world with dialogue. Your support and backing in building his/her relationships are important.
- Remember that your son/daughter's happiness or unhappiness does not depend on his/her sexual orientation/gender identity, but on the surrounding family and social environment. If you want his/her happiness, that is where you must act.
- Do not be ashamed of your son/daughter or the fact that you may be judged a "wrong" family. It is not by hiding that life can become easier. As he/she did by affirming and declaring his/her non heterosexuality/transgenderism, so can your entire family, if only in some areas and contexts.
- There are many other families with non-heterosexual/non cisgender children. Hanging out with other parents who have gone through the same experiences can help tremendously in regaining that balance that seems to have been lost.
- See to it that you have a united family. Do not allow other children to take an attitude of rejection or hostility toward their brother's or sister's non heterosexuality/transgenderism. If a family member is in a more difficult position, the family should huddle around him/her and protect him/her.
- Allow your children to frequent gay-friendly environments: kids need to understand that they are not the only ones on the face of the earth, that non heterosexual and transgender people are not aliens, that homo-bisexual relationship patterns may also differ from those they were used to in a predominantly heterosexual environment, and maybe they even want to find a partner. If you fear that these are "places of perdition", remember that it is not being gay or straight that makes the difference in consuming casual sex, but it is the kind of awareness and self-care education acquired while growing up that makes the difference in helping you deal with situations that may occur.

- Open your home to your son or daughter's non heterosexual/non cisgender friends. This is for several reasons:
 - At least inside the home he/she will be able to express himself/herself and be happy in his/her relationships;
 - It allows you to get to know other non-heterosexual/non cisgender people and thus understand that they are like everyone else.
 - It gives you a way to get to know who he/she hangs out with by reassuring you about the common concerns of all parents.

6. Terms to know and use (glossary)

This glossary provides a concise definition of the most frequently terms used when dealing with the issues of sexual orientation and gender identity, in order to offer a shared vocabulary. The glossary entries do not follow alphabetical order but a thematic development.

- **SEX:** the biological and anatomical characteristics of the male and female as determined by the sex chromosomes.
- **GENDER:** in our culture, a social and cultural category built on the biological differences of the sexes (male gender VS female gender).
- **GENDER IDENTITY:** the perception of self as male or female or another gender.
- **GENDER ROLE:** the set of social expectations and patterns that determine how men and women should behave in a given culture and historical period.
- **SEXUAL ORIENTATION:** the direction of affective and sexual attraction to other people.
- **GENDER AND SEXUAL DIVERSITY (GSD)** (or simply **SEXUAL DIVERSITY**): refers to all the diversities of sex characteristics, sexual orientations and gender identities, without the need to specify each of the identities, behaviours, or characteristics that form this plurality.
- **HETEROSEXUAL:** person affectively and sexually attracted to people of the opposite sex.
- **HOMOSEXUAL:** person affectively and sexually attracted to persons of the same sex.
- **BISEXUAL:** person affectively and sexually attracted to people of both sexes.

- **LESBIAN:** homosexual woman.
- **GAY:** homosexual man (the term is also used to refer to homosexual women in Anglo-Saxon-speaking countries).
- **TRANSSEXUAL:** a person who feels persistently that he/she belongs to the opposite gender and, therefore, goes through a social and/or surgical transition process (this transition generally ends with surgical sex reassignment).
- **TRANSGENDER:** an “umbrella” term that includes all people who do not identify with the current gender identity and gender role models, believing them to be too restrictive in relation to their own experience.
- **CISGENDER:** a term used to describe a person whose [gender identity](#) corresponds to their [sex assigned at birth](#).
- **TRAVERS:** a person who habitually wears clothes of the opposite sex, regardless of own sexual orientation or gender identity.
- **DRAG QUEEN/DRAG KING:** man, who dresses as a woman (queen) or woman who dresses as a man (king) by accentuating their characteristics for artistic or playful purposes.
- **INTERSEXUALITY:** a condition of a person who, due to genetic causes, is born with genitalia and/or secondary sexual characteristics that cannot be defined as exclusively male or female.
- **LGBT:** an acronym of Anglo-Saxon origin used to refer to people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual transgender and transsexual. It is also sometimes declined as LGBTIQA+, encompassing people who experience an intersex condition, the term “queer” and the term “asexual”.
- **ASEXUALITY:** who feels (almost) no sexual desire or romantic attraction.
- **QUEER:** an English term (strange, unusual) that was used in a derogatory sense against homosexuals. Revived more recently in a political/cultural sense, and in a positive key, to denote all facets of gender identity and sexual orientation, while

at the same time rejecting the more rigidly fixed categories still present in the term LGBTIQ+ and claiming their overcoming.

- **COMING OUT:** an expression used to refer to the decision to declare one's non heterosexuality/transgenderism. It derives from the English phrase coming out of the closet (coming out of the wall closet), that is, coming out of the open, coming out. In a broader sense, coming out represents the whole path that a person takes to become aware of his/her non heterosexuality/transgenderism, accept it, begin to experience romantic relationships and coming out.
- **OUTING:** an expression used to refer to the disclosure of someone's homosexuality by third persons without the consent of the person concerned. The homosexual liberation movement has sometimes used outing as a political practice to reveal the homosexuality of public figures (politicians, church representatives, journalists) who are secretly homosexual but take publicly homophobic positions.
- **VISIBILITY:** it is the result of the path of self-acceptance that allows a non-heterosexual/non cisgender person to live his/her identity in the light of day.
- **HETEROSEXISM:** a worldview that regards only heterosexuality as natural, taking it for granted that all people are heterosexual. Heterosexism rejects and stigmatizes all forms of non-heterosexual behaviour, identity and relationships. It manifests itself at both the individual and cultural levels, influencing social customs and institutions, and is the root cause of homophobia.
- **HOMOPHOBIA:** the prejudice, fear and hostility toward homosexual people and the actions that result from this prejudice. It can lead to acts of violence against people who are homosexuals. May 17 has been chosen internationally as the World Day Against homophobia, in remembrance of May 17, 1990, when the World Health Organization removed homosexuality from the list of mental illnesses.
- **INTERIORIZED HOMOPHOBIA:** an often-unconscious form of homophobia, the result of education and values transmitted by society, of which homosexual people themselves are sometimes victims.

- **HOMONEGATIVITY:** the term “homophobia” today is partly outdated and replaced with the term homonegativity to indicate that acts of discrimination and violence against people who are homosexuals are not necessarily irrational or the result of fear, but rather the expression of a negative conception of homosexuality that stems from a culture and society that is heterosexist.
- **TRANSPHOBIA:** prejudice, fear and hostility toward transgender and transsexual people (and those seen as transgressive with respect to gender roles) and the actions that result from this prejudice result. Transphobia can lead to acts of violence against people who are transgender/transsexual. November 20 is recognized internationally as the Transgender Day of Remembrance (T-DOR) to commemorate the victims of transphobic violence, in memory of Rita Hester, whose murder in 1998 initiated the Remembering Our Dead project.
- **INTERIORIZED TRANSPHOBIA:** a form of transphobia that is often unconscious, the result of education and values transmitted by society, of which transgender people themselves are sometimes victims.
- **PRIDE:** an expression that refers to the event and initiatives held annually on occasion of World LGBT Pride Day, in the days preceding or following the date June 28, which commemorates the Stonewall Uprising, which culminated precisely on June 28, 1969. The so-called Stonewall Riots were a series of violent clashes between transgender and homosexual people and police in New York City. The first night of the riots was on Friday, June 27, 1969, when police raided the place called the Stonewall Inn, a gay bar on Christopher Street in Greenwich Village. “Stonewall” (as the incident is usually referred to in brief) is generally considered from a symbolic point of view the birth moment of the modern LGBTIQ+ liberation movement worldwide.

Deliverable information

Grant Agreement No.	
Project acronym	My-ID
Project title	My-ID – My Identity, My Idea to be Myself
Erasmus+ project nr.	2021-1-IT02-KA220-SCH-000034423
Project duration	1 November 2021 – 1 November 2023
Timeframe	Production reader: September 2023
WP	3: Parents Guidance
Result/deliverable	3.2 Manual on how to reach out and work with parents
Status	Final version
Version number	1
Deliverable responsible	FONDAZIONE-HALLGARTEN FRANCHETTI CENTRO STUDI VILLA MONTESCA
Dissemination level	PUBLIC
Citation	
Copyright	The content of this reader is copyright of FVM and cannot be reproduced without permission.
Due date	31/10/2023
Date of this version	08/11/2023

Project result coordinator

Name	
Organization	Fondazione Hallgarten - Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montesca
Email	mariarita.bracchini@montesca.eu
Postal address:	Loc. Montesca snc, 06012 Città di Castello (Pg)

Version history

Version	Date	Author	Description
1.0	16-10-2023	Paolo Antonelli	First draft (long)
1.1	31-10-2023	Paolo Antonelli	Second draft
1.2	08/11/2023	Paolo Antonelli	Final version

62

Author list

Name	Organisation
Prof. Paolo Antonelli	Fondazione Hallgarten - Franchetti Centro Studi Villa Montesca

Note on language

In this reader, we use the acronym LGBTIQ+ for Lesbian, gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex conditions, queer and “+” for “other identities related to sexual and gender diversity”. We use the term “sexual and gender diversity” as colloquial language to summarise diversity of sexual orientations, of gender identities and of sexual characteristics (intersex conditions and identities).

Partners



Coordinator
Fondazione Hallgarten – Franchetti
Centro Studi Villa Montesca
Italy

Defoin

DEFOIN – Formación para el Desarrollo y la Inserción
Spain

GALE

GALE – Stichting Global Alliance for LGBT Education
Netherlands



EUROTRAINING – Educational Organization
Greece



CESIE
Italy



Xarxa I Col·laboració Serveis Educatius, S.L.
Spain



Iedersland College
Netherlands



Douka Ekpaideftiria AE – Palladion Lykeion
Ekfpaideuthria Douka
Greece

My ID © 2022 is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 4.0. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>



Funded by the European Union. Views and opinions expressed are however those of the author(s) only and do not necessarily reflect those of the European Union or the European Education and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA). Neither the European Union nor EACEA can be held responsible for them.



Co-funded by
the European Union