

My parents don't believe I'm bi! ^[1]

Dear Alice,

I came out recently to my parents as being bisexual. They were surprised, as expected, but they didn't believe me! They said it's "not normal for someone to suddenly change their orientation." But it wasn't sudden ? I've known for a while! What should I tell them?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Congratulations on coming out! It can take a lot of nerve because, as your case shows, it's hard to predict how people will react. Many people grow up being told implicitly or explicitly that they're straight and that's the "right" way to be. There are plenty of people who also assume that almost everyone else is straight, too ? except maybe that really flame-y hairdresser or the butch woman who's a car mechanic. But those are stereotypes, and the reality is that you can't tell if someone is heterosexual or not just by looking. In that same way, plenty of parents may also assume their kids are straight, but that assumption can be wrong! It sounds like your parents need a little Sexuality 101.

Even though being bisexual has been a part of who you are for a while now, your announcement may seem to come out of the blue for your parents. Your parents could probably use some help understanding the possible reasons you didn't tell them about your sexuality earlier. Many people who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) may find it confusing that their feelings aren't in line with others' expectations or assumptions about sexual orientation. It can take a while to figure out what's going on. There's also the factor of homophobia. Even though there are lesbian characters on television, gay politicians, and bisexual comedians, there's still plenty of discrimination against LGBTQ people. This can make it scary or dangerous to come out, or at the very least, make some folks think twice about it. Even when outright hate isn't a concern, often people feel afraid to disappoint people they're close to, cause them worry, or make them uncomfortable. It's not strange, then, that it might take someone some time to figure out the right words, the right time, and the right setting in which to come out.

The other thing is, the more people discuss sexual orientation openly and honestly, the more it seems societal norms and expectations around sexuality *can* change. This is not to say that people can be "cured" of being gay (or any orientation). Rather, the point is that attraction and eroticism are complex and fluid: folks can discover new things about themselves or their

tastes may change with time. Becoming more comfortable these concepts is a worthy goal; it may just happen gradually for some with continued exposure to them, through discussions, or learning about them elsewhere.

With that in mind, it may take your parents a bit of time to adjust to your news, just like it may have taken you a while to think through your sexuality. Are they open to talking further with you? Maybe you can help them understand your experience by describing how you realized you were bisexual, what it's been like to realize, or what you like and don't like about it. For people who have never questioned their own sexual orientation or thought about what it might be like to be lesbian, gay, or bi, it might be completely unfamiliar terrain. To help your parents start to get on the same page and continue the conversation, you might suggest that they check out [PFLAG \(Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays\)](#) [2]. Not only can they find a local chapter to meet other parents who have also struggled with a child's sexual orientation, but they can access a number of online resources to learn more about sexual orientation, specific terminology, and other frequently asked questions about folks in the LGBTQ community.

With time, your parents will hopefully come around. Just remember that patience and open communication ? both talking and listening ? can help smooth the journey.

Alice!

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