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. Most people grow up being told implicitly or explicitly that they're straight and that's the right way to be. Most people 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 you can't tell if someone's hetero or not just by looking. In that same way, most parents 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 bi 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 lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ) identifying people may find it confusing that their feelings are different than how they're told they should be. It can take a while to figure out what's going on. There's also the homophobia factor. Even though we have lesbian characters on TV, gay politicians, and bisexual comedians, there's still plenty of discrimination against LGBTQ people. This can make it scary or even dangerous to come out. 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 we discuss sexual orientation openly and honestly, the more it seems it can change. This is not to say that people can be "cured" of being gay. Rather, the point is that attraction and eroticism are complex and fluid: people can discover new things about themselves or their tastes may change with time.

For more information, you might have your parents check out PFLAG (Parents, Friends, and Families of Lesbians and Gays) [2] to meet other parents who have also struggled with a
child's sexual orientation, come to terms, and want to help other parents do the same.

Just like it may have taken you a while to think through your sexuality, it may take your parents a bit of time to adjust to your news. Are they open to talking 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. 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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Published date:
Mar 23, 2007
Last reviewed on:
Oct 11, 2012

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