

Categories		Excerpts from the interviews
4	Join a support group	<p><i>“Getting a support group for people would be helpful because when we were in that situation there was no one that you could really go and talk to ...”</i></p> <p><i>“Yes, yes, suggest a support group where people can talk ... I feel if other parents can hear some others that they are not the only ones...”</i> Boxer <i>et al.</i> (in Ben-Ari, 1995a:108) endorse the idea of a support group and state that support groups provide parents with information about homo-sexuality, reinforce their newfound knowledge, and provide them with role models to support and facilitate their own process of “coming out”.</p>
5	Get support from your own family	<p><i>“You need someone to support you in your own family”</i> (Clarke, 1987:13).</p>
6	Pray about it	<p><i>“And another thing that will help is to take it to the Lord because that is another way that you can find inner peace. Don’t try and carry the burden on your own because you will never make it, not at all.”</i></p>
7	Do not hold onto false hope	<p><i>“They are not going to change. They are born like that and that is going to be their lifestyle. The parents in Warren and Wiedenkeller’s (1993) research added the following advice in this regard: “Don’t try and change them or insist that they change themselves. It won’t do any good, and it could be harmful. Whatever you do, do not reject your child.”</i></p>

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS PERTAINING TO FURTHER AND FUTURE RESEARCH

The above research findings constitute the experiences of parents regarding the coming-out process of a gay or lesbian child. Based on the research findings and the literature verification, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- Parents experienced a variety of feelings consequent to the coming out of their gay/lesbian child. The feelings experienced included feelings of loss, shock, disappointment, embarrassment, fear, guilt, sadness and hurt, and feelings of relief and happiness.
- The reactions of the participants consequent to the coming out of their gay/lesbian child resembled what is often described in literature as typical “grief reactions” (LaSala, 2000), in that they (amongst other things) grieved about their child’s image, which they have nurtured over the years. The participants went through Kübler-Ross’s grieving stages, beginning with shock, moving through denial, anger, bargaining, sadness and depression, and eventual acceptance (Ben-Ari, 1995a:93; LaSala, 2000).
- Various factors helped the participants to accept their child’s homosexuality. This included relabelling the child’s homosexuality as God’s plan to support the child, relabelling the child’s homosexual identity as something God wanted him/her to have, accepting the child’s homosexual identity or face the consequence of losing him/her, realising that it is not a choice to be gay/lesbian, realising that there are many gay people and parents with gay children, reading about homosexuality and how parents with a homosexual child cope,

realising that the child is happy, accepting the child's homosexual identity, suspecting for some time that their child might be gay/lesbian, and getting support from various sources.

- The following factors complicated the process for the parents in accepting their child's homosexuality: fear of the stigma attached to having a homosexual child, fear of being rejected by friends, fear that the child should show his/her affection to the partner in public, fear of reaction for close family members, the church's stance on homosexuality, parents' own beliefs about homosexuality, finding the sexual aspect of their child's relationship difficult to accept, finding it more difficult to accept a child's homosexuality when one is older, and the child's problems prior to and after coming out.
- The advice given by the participants to other parents in a similar situation included the following: try to understand, love and support them and do not forsake them, and educate yourself about homosexuality and about having a gay or lesbian child and how to come to terms with it.

Based on these conclusions, the following recommendations, specifically to further and future research, are made:

- In view of the fact that this research study was not a reflection of all the population groups comprising the rainbow nation, the researchers want to recommend a follow-up study in this regard, which should comprise a sample specifically including parents from the black, the coloured and the Indian communities.
- It is also recommended that in future a research project (with a qualitative approach) be undertaken on a topic related to this subject, namely the experiences of siblings regarding the coming-out process of a gay brother or lesbian sister.

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Dr Assim Alpaslan, Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Work, University of South Africa, Pretoria, South Africa.

Ms Theresa Johnston, Social Worker, Child Protection Unit, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.

Ms Veonna Goliath, Lecturer, Department of Social Development Professions, Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, Port Elizabeth, South Africa.