



HOW TO ESTABLISH AND RUN A PFLAG GROUP

If you are reading this you may have a child who is lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex (LGBTI). You may have found out about the international Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) network and would like to start a PFLAG Group in your area or you may simply want to find more information for yourself and/or to help and support other families with LGBTI sons and daughters.

Start by becoming a PFLAG Contact

There are almost certainly more parents like you in your area – one in ten people are gay or lesbian. However, they may not want to meet officially as a group but they may appreciate meeting individually. As a PFLAG contact your main role is likely to be a source of information and possible support for others.

Develop a PFLAG Group

If you can get other people interested and have some spare time, it's worthwhile forming a PFLAG Group and holding meetings.

Meetings

Find a meeting place where people feel safe to talk and are not intimidated. Meetings may start as a social gathering with the need for a formal committee only necessary over time.

Incorporating group sessions into meeting can sometimes be helpful to everyone present – more information provided below.

If possible have a guest speaker who is relevant to parents' understanding and education eg a local social worker, community health worker, friendly teacher or a lesbian or gay male telling their story.

Finding information

The internet is a great source of information. Other PFLAG groups will be pleased to provide you with resources and leaflets that can be given to people seeking support and understanding.

Promoting the Group

Advertise in local papers, especially in the community events section, which is usually free.

Visit the principal at the local school, medical centres etc. to let them know that a PFLAG group is there to support families.

The PFLAG group in your capital city will be very pleased to add your contact details to their website or contact details

Try to attend LGBTI events and become known to others, this will help you gain credibility and for them to feel confident with you.

Offer to talk to other community organisations to explain what PFLAG is about (for example - the local Council, Rotary, Country Women's Association, churches and schools and local radio) to name just a few!

Develop a Face Book page and share information – this will help grow your PFLAG group.

Become friendly with journalists, this will mean they will come to you seeking opinions which provide publicity and they will be more willing to help you advertise.

Get a media list together and do media releases to publicise events or comment on published issues that concern you.

Keep records of contacts

Keep phone numbers, addresses and email addresses of those who seek support so when you have enough names and contacts you can begin meetings officially.

Have referrals for your local area and capital city so you can advise people of extra services with those who specialise in LGBTI Services. Psychologists, medical centres, social groups and legal people are a good start.

Raising funds

The usual fund-raisers, stalls, sausage sizzles and raffles may be enough to fund your PFLAG group.

Funding may be advertised for voluntary organisations – be prepared to submit an application.

Local businesses or corporations may be willing to sponsor your PFLAG group.

TIPS TO CONSIDER WHEN LEADING A GROUP Counselling

Set up

- Arrive early and ensure you have brought tea, coffee, milk and sugar.
- Set up the room. Some groups may like an open circle others like to sit around a table. You decide on what works for your group.
- Have name tags, this makes it easy for people to remember names.
- Have a box of tissues nearby.

Welcome

- Officially welcome everyone to the meeting, assure confidentiality and that no one will be judgemental.
- Let it be known that only one person speaks at a time.

Sharing stories

- Ask who would like to start. If no one volunteers, you start by stating your name, whether you have a son or daughter that's LGBTI, how long you have known and where you are now on the scale of 6 months to feel confident to tell family and friends.
- Let it be known that no one has to speak or tell their story. It's okay to just listen. People should not feel pressured.
- Ensure no individual dominates the meeting and people are respectful of each other.
- Don't be surprised if people only come along to a few meetings. It's common when people become comfortable with their child's sexuality they move on and wonder what the fuss was all about. Don't feel it's your fault.

Remember. . .

- Do not judge anyone who comes to a meeting.
- Listen to people and if possible take note of their body language, it can tell you if they are comfortable or becoming distressed.
- Show patience with those who are slow to move towards understanding. Reassure them that they will feel better eventually.
- Do not condone deliberate homophobic comments. There is a difference between genuine ignorance and hatred.
- If someone is especially quiet, ask them if they would like to speak? Or do they have an opinion on what has been said earlier?
- Also if you don't know the answer, say so. Let it be known that we are parents, not professional counsellors.