



**Loving your
child** when they
are different

This booklet was written on the lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations. We acknowledge their Elders past and present and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded; this was and always will be Aboriginal land.

This booklet was created by a group of people from various cultural and faith backgrounds who have experience with its topics. Their expertise and guidance have shaped the stories and messages told in this booklet. The stories reflect the real lives of people and communities in Australia. The stories are created, but they are based on the true stories of people from many cultural and faith communities in Australia.

A special thank you to the project steering group for their expertise, encouragement, and guidance. Thank you to the survivors from different faiths and cultures who guided this work. Finally, thank you to the Australian GLBTQIA+ Multicultural Council (AGMC) and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC) for making this booklet possible.

Please note: *This booklet does not constitute legal advice. We encourage anyone who wants to know more about what is covered by the law to visit the [VEOHRC website](#) for more information.*

Our stories include these people, and more...



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Lebanese Muslim

Daughter of Mariam,
mother of Layla



Mariam, 73

Lebanese Muslim

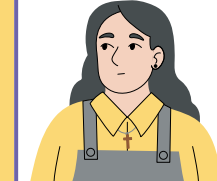
Mother of Fatima,
grandmother of Layla



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Lebanese Muslim

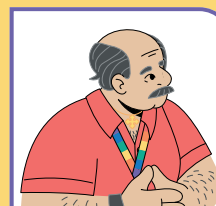
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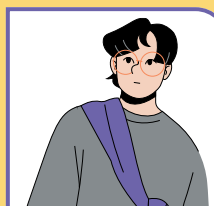
Fatima's friend



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**Egyptian Coptic
Christian**

School Chaplain



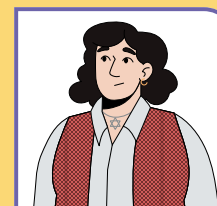
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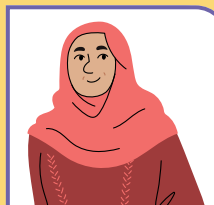
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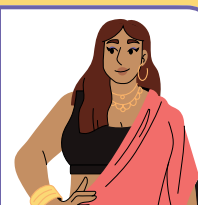
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Fatima has something on her mind

Mariam and her daughter Fatima migrated to Australia from Lebanon in 1983. They live together with Fatima's children in the outer suburbs of Melbourne. They have a good life. Fatima's three children go to school nearby and her oldest daughter Layla has almost graduated.

Fatima is often busy during the day running her small business. But she always has time for her favourite part of the day: having an afternoon coffee with her mother, Mariam. Today, there is something on Fatima's mind.



Fatima: Mama, I want to talk to you about something.

Mariam: What is it, Fatima?

Fatima: Mama, I am worried about my daughter Layla. I think Layla likes girls. She told me she does not want to get married.

Mariam: I see. Layla has always had a strong mind. What is it that makes you worry?

Fatima: You know I always dreamed about Layla's wedding day. I dreamed about planning it with her. I wanted to pass down the jewellery you gave to me on my wedding day.

Mariam: I understand, Fatima. It is an important part of our family and our heritage.

Fatima: You know that this is not okay in our community. It would bring shame on the family.

Mariam: Fatima, I understand you are scared. We all want to protect our children. When I was your age, I was scared to come to Australia. I did not want to take you from your home. But I wanted to do what was best for you.

Fatima: So, what can we do for Layla? I want her to have a good life.

Mariam: I understand, Fatima. It is normal to be afraid for your child's future. Before we decide what to do, let's listen to some stories.

We all hope that our children are happy and healthy, and we all want to protect them. Many families hope that their children will follow their faith and culture, get married and have children of their own.

As a parent or carer, you might have spent years imagining your child's future. You might look forward to weddings, grandchildren, and passing on important traditions. Learning that your child may have a different sexuality or gender can feel like that future is disappearing.

You might not know what to do if you think your child is attracted to the same gender or has a different gender identity. It is normal to feel grief, fear or even shame, especially if you have been told in your community that this is not okay. These feelings can come from how much you love your child.

Your child is probably afraid too. More than anything, they want to know that your love for them has not changed.

It takes courage to think about how you can support your child and your family. As you read this booklet you may feel many different things. That is okay. The stories here are based on real experiences, and have been gathered from people across different faiths and cultures. You and your family are not alone.

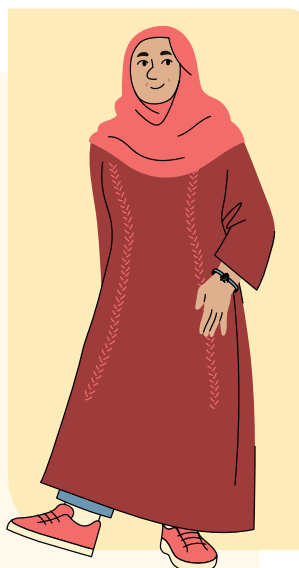
Some people grow up realising that they are attracted to the same gender, or that they feel like a different gender. People with different sexualities and gender identities have existed from the beginning of time in every culture across the world. Every culture and language has their own words for these experiences. (If you want to learn more, please visit the [AGMC website](#))

Some people grow up hearing that people with a different sexuality or gender identity are not and cannot be a part of their culture or faith community. Sometimes they might be told that they are unnatural, wrong, or sick because they are different. This booklet is for anyone who has heard these things, and for the families who love them.

Rima's fears

Rima is from Lebanon and recently came to Australia with her family. They fled their home because of war and their life changed forever. Life in Australia is not easy. Rima lives with her parents and four siblings in a small house. In Lebanon, her mother always told her, **"You will marry a good Muslim man and have children."** Now, in Australia, her family want her to continue their cultural traditions.

Sometimes, when she feels scared, Rima writes in her diary. One day, Rima writes, **"Mama says I must marry a Muslim man here in Australia. I am worried because I know I do not like boys. I do not want to get married, but I must obey my family. I am scared and confused. I am afraid to lose my family and my community. They are the only people I know in Australia. But if they knew, they would disown me."**



Rima's story is still unfolding. Many people reading this booklet may feel the way she does right now.

It can be very painful to be told that you do not belong in your community. It is also painful when people tell you there is something wrong with you. Many people grow up feeling afraid that they will be rejected because of their sexuality or gender. They might worry they will not be welcome in their faith or cultural community. They might even fear that they will not be allowed to be a part of their own family.

Hearing these things can make people feel uncomfortable and unsafe. They might start to believe that something is very wrong with them. This might make them feel like they need to change to fit in. They might even feel like they need to hide parts of themselves, even from those they love.

Nikolas prays for things to be different

Nikolas loves going to his Greek Orthodox church with his family every Sunday. Religion is a big part of their life. Nikolas feels connected to his culture and community at church. But Nikolas has never told anyone that he likes men. People at church say that being gay is an abomination. Nikolas is afraid that he will be asked to leave the community.

One day, Nikolas asks his priest to hear his confession. He cups his hands, right over left.

"Reverend Father, I have sinned. Sometimes I think about men." The priest sadly shakes his head and says, **"Nikolas, I want you to pray to God to take away these feelings. Come to me whenever you have these thoughts."** Then, the priest prays for Nikolas **"God forgive you in this life and the next. Be at peace"**.

Nikolas believes there is something wrong with him. He thinks he must change his sexuality to please God and belong in his community. He goes to confession every week to ask for advice. For the next few years, Nikolas prays every day for God to change his sexuality.



Question: has anyone ever made you feel like you do not belong? How did this make you feel?

Fatima talks with Christina

Fatima has a friend called Christina. Christina's children are friends with Fatima's children at school. Christina is from the Philippines and she is Catholic. Fatima and Christina are part of the school council and became good friends.

One day, Christina and Fatima are baking food for a school fundraiser.



Fatima: Christina, can I ask you something?

Christina: Of course, Fatima. We always help each other. What is going on?

Fatima: I think my daughter likes girls. I am sure you understand what it is like. In my community, we do not accept this.

Christina: I understand, Fatima. I am also worried about my son. In my community, we do not talk about these things. It would bring shame on my family if people knew.

Fatima: So, what did you do?

Christina: In my faith, we ask the priest for advice. I went to him and I told him that I am worried about my son.

Fatima: What did he say?

Christina: He said that my son is experiencing "same sex attraction". He explained that as long as my son remains celibate, everything will be okay. He said that God wants our son to have a traditional family. He said we should encourage him to follow this path. He knows a counsellor in the community who can fix people.

Fatima: How is your son now?

Christina: I told him that I love him, but it would be sinful for him to have a boyfriend. He would be turning away from God. He has been seeing that counsellor for months now. But he seems worse. He is often sad and does not talk to me much.

Fatima: What do you think I should do?

Christina: You could ask your Imam. He might know someone who can help.

Fatima: My mother says I should try to understand Layla. She says she has seen this happen before and it always ends in pain.

Christina: It is more important to protect our children. Do you want Layla to have a good life?

Fatima: Of course I do. I love my daughter, and I want her to be well. What would be the loving thing to do?

People in the family or the community might want a person to hide or change their sexuality or their gender identity because they think it is wrong or shameful. Sometimes people might try to change or hide their own sexuality or gender identity. They might do this because they have been told that something is wrong with them. They might be afraid that they will be rejected.

Trying to make someone change or hide their sexuality or gender is called a “conversion practice”. These practices happen because people believe those with different genders and sexualities need to change. They also believe that it is possible to do so. They might think they need to do this to fit into their religious or cultural community.

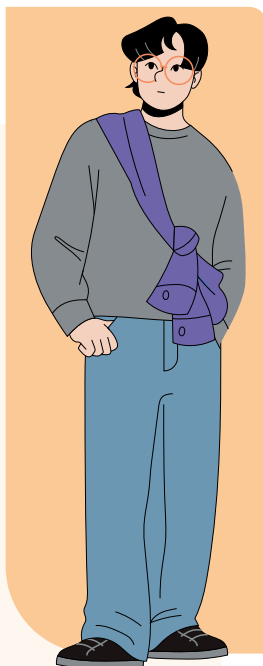
Conversion practices can look like many different things. Sometimes conversion practices might be organised or structured. They could look like a medical appointment, counselling, or a program.

Jun feels uncomfortable

Jun’s parents are from China. They came to Australia before Jun was born. Growing up in Australia, Jun’s parents always said, **“If you do not get married and have kids, who is going to look after you when you are old? I am saying this for your own good.”** They often go to the Buddhist temple together and pray that Jun will get married one day.

Jun feels uncomfortable wearing dresses and being called a girl. One day, Jun cuts their hair short. Jun really likes how their new hair looks. It makes Jun feel like a tomboy. When Jun’s mum sees their new hairstyle, she is very upset. She says, **“Being like this is not healthy. You will make us lose face. How are you going to visit your auntie next week looking like a boy? She will think I do not know how to raise my daughter.”**

Later that day, Jun’s mum says, **“We are going to China. You must see a doctor there who can fix you.”** Jun tries to seek help from their dad. He wags his finger and says, **“Do not give your mum grief by dressing like this! Why do you have to cause trouble? Can you just be normal like the other girls at your university?”**



Conversion practices are often less structured. They can look like everyday things. They might look like a conversation with a family member or a religious leader. They might look like pressure to act a certain way, like ending a relationship or being threatened with being thrown out of the family home. If someone tries to change part of a person (their sexuality or gender identity) then it could be a conversion practice.

Akinde talks with his pastor

Akinde is from Nigeria. He came to Australia to study at university. Akinde often experiences racism at university and he feels lonely. He starts going to a Pentecostal church. The church is very multicultural, and it makes him feel like part of a community. One day, the pastor asks Akinde how life is going in Australia.

Akinde tells him, **“Pastor Dan, I am doing well in my studies. I have great friends here at church. But there is something I want to ask you. I think I might be gay. My family will cut me off if they find out. How can I change?”**

Pastor Dan puts his hand on Akinde’s shoulder. **“Akinde, I understand your worry. I can help you. Let me show you some Bible passages and I will pray for you.”** Pastor Dan prays for Akinde. Then he says, **“There is a group at church that meet every week. You can talk to them about this.”**

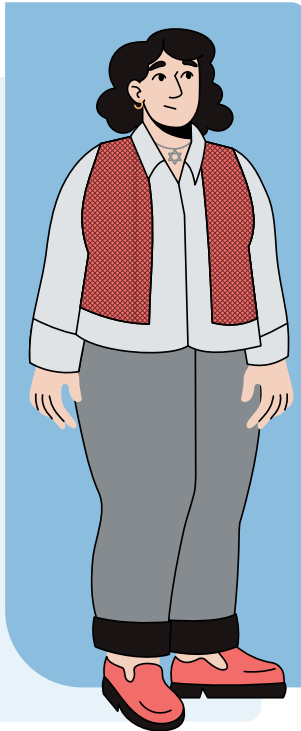
Akinde visits the group and meets other young men who talk about their unwanted same sex attraction. They talk about why they are this way and encourage each other to fast and pray to be healed.



Esther knows what she wants

Esther is Jewish and she has a girlfriend. She keeps her relationship secret from her family because she knows they will not approve. One day, Esther's aunt tells her parents about Esther's girlfriend. Her parents approach her and say, **"Esther, you need to end this relationship. You should be getting married or you will disappoint your grandparents."**

Esther disagrees. She says, **"I want to get married. I want a traditional religious household. I just want it with a woman."** Esther's father throws his hands up in the air. **"This is an abomination! You bring shame to our family. No Esther, we will find you a good man to marry in the community."** For the next several years, Esther's parents tell her to end her relationship with her girlfriend. They introduce her to men in the community and encourage her to marry a man.



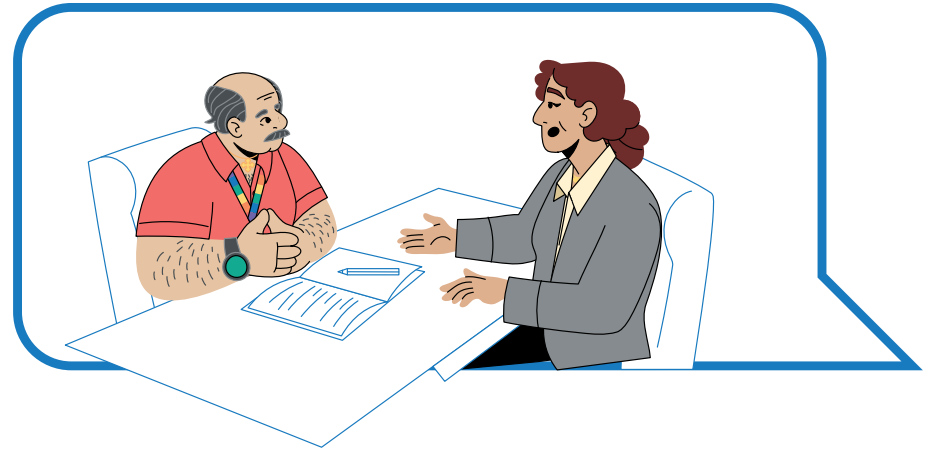
Fatima talks with Keroles

Many months later, Layla has graduated from school. She did very well in her exams and Fatima is proud. Layla is now preparing to go to university.

One day, Fatima gets a call from Keroles. Keroles is the chaplain at her children's school. Keroles wants to meet with Fatima at school to talk about Layla.

Keroles: I want to talk to you about Layla. She stopped by to see me recently. She was troubled and asked for my advice. She feels you are upset with her because of who she is. She said you want her to talk to an Imam about healing her sexuality. She is afraid that the community, maybe even her family, will not accept her.

Fatima: Keroles, I love my daughter. But I do not want my daughter to be with another girl. I just wish things were different. I worry about her future. I want her to do what is right. I thought maybe speaking to an Imam could help her find her way back.



Keroles: I hear how much you care. You want to protect her. I have seen many families try to change their children. It always ends the same way. The child becomes more distant. Fatima, in many parts of Australia there are laws that protect people from being pressured to change their sexuality or gender identity.

Fatima: Laws? I did not know that.

Keroles: They exist because too many families learned this the hard way. These laws are **not** about telling you how to practice your faith. They are about making sure no one is harmed.

Fatima: Harm? I never meant to hurt Layla. I am only trying to do what is best for her.

Keroles: Do you remember how people treated us when we came here?

Fatima: Yes, people told me to go back to my country.

Keroles: People tell us that we do not belong in Australia because of our culture and the colour of our skin. At least we have each other. People like Layla do not have that.

Fatima: What do you mean?

Kerolos: There are people all over the world who have different sexualities and gender identities. Some people call them LGBTQA. They are told they are wrong because of who they are. Layla wants to belong in your family and your community just as much as you want to belong in Australia. There are so many people like Layla in the world. They deserve acceptance and love, too.

Fatima: I never thought of it that way. I just want to keep my daughter safe. But I see now, maybe she needs me to stand by her, even if it is hard for me to understand.

Kerolos: All we can do is love each other, even when it is difficult.

Question: Can you remember a time when you felt accepted? What did this mean to you?

What is LGBTQA?

People with different genders and sexualities use many different words to talk about themselves. Sometimes people use the term 'LGBTQA'. The letters stand for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender or gender diverse, Queer and Asexual.

Different cultures and languages have their own terms for different sexualities and genders. Some of these terms are used in this booklet. You can find more terms in the glossary on page 28.

Throughout history and across cultures, diverse gender roles and sexualities have existed and been respected in various societies. (If you want to know more about these, visit the AGMC website, www.agmc.org.au/publications-lovingyourchild, for more information).

What happens when you ask someone to change?



You might believe that you are protecting your child by asking them to change. It makes sense that you want to help your child. Someone might even have told you this would work. But you are asking them to change a vital part of themselves. Doing this will hurt your child, even if you mean well.

Conversion practices do not work. A person cannot change their sexuality or gender identity.

These practices can cause a lot of harm. They can hurt a person's mental, physical and spiritual wellbeing. They can lead to long-term mental health issues and even suicide.

It is important to protect children and adults from harm. These practices are banned in many parts of Australia. They are banned because we know they hurt people and they do not work. There are other things you can do to support someone if you think they have a different sexuality or gender.

In Victoria, the *Change or Suppression (Conversion) Practices Prohibition Act 2021* (CSP Act) bans people from trying to change or hide a person's sexuality or gender identity.

Conversion practices can include teachings, counselling, spiritual care activities or psychological and medical practices, based on the idea that there is something wrong with a person's sexuality or gender. To legally be a conversion practice under the CSP Act the actions must:

1. Be aimed at someone
2. Be because of that other person's sexuality or gender identity
3. Be intending to change or suppress that other person's sexual orientation or gender identity.

If your child, or someone you know, has experienced conversion practices, you can get more information or report this to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC).

To find out more about this law, please visit the [VEOHRC website](http://veohrc.org.au).

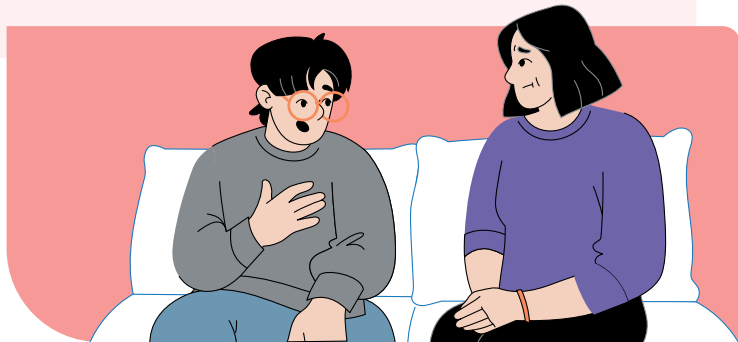
Jun talks with their aunt

Jun's family took them to China to see a doctor. When they returned to Australia, Jun went to stay with an aunt. Jun's aunt is very worried. Jun does not seem well. **"Jun, you have been so sad since you came back. Tell me, what happened in China?"**

Jun looks at their hands and says, **"Auntie, I was really scared. I did not know what was happening. We arrived at a strange place. Mum told me I was going to get better. She said I was going to change. The doctor told me he can fix me. I just wanted it to end. Sometimes I pretended I am really a girl so that I could leave."**

Jun looks up at their aunt and says, **"I have not changed, Auntie. It did not work. I am transgender. In China, people call it *kuà xìng bié* 跨性別. That means I am not a girl."** Jun's aunt looks concerned and asks, **"What does this mean? Can you still have children?"**

Jun replies, **"I am still the same person. I can have children like anyone else. But I want to wear boy's clothes and wear my hair short."** Jun's aunt nods and says, **"I will help you talk to your mum."**



Note: It is against the law to take a person outside of Victoria to go through conversion practices.

Nikolas feels depressed

It has been a few years since Nikolas first confessed to the priest. Nikolas is very depressed and he does not go out anymore. One day, his parents ask him to talk. **"Nikolas, we are worried about you. Most days you are very sad. Sometimes we can hear you crying in your bedroom. What is wrong, Nikolas?"**

Nikolas covers his face with his hands. **"Mum and Dad, I do not know what to do anymore. I think I am gay, but I want to change. I have been praying to God, but it does not work. I cannot go on like this anymore."**

Nikolas' mum and dad put their arms around him. His mum says, **"Nikolas, we love you no matter what. We do not know what to do, but we do not want you to keep hurting yourself. We will figure this out together."**



People who have experienced these practices carry real pain. Healing takes time. It can help to talk to someone who truly understands. This could be a professional, a trusted friend or even someone who has been through something similar.

If someone tells you that what happened to them was harmful, believe them. They need to know that what happened was not okay.

Many people with different sexualities and genders have had to stand up for themselves when someone asks them to change. This takes real strength. They know who they are and they know that they cannot and do not need to change.

Even after something painful, people find joy and meaning in their lives. There are lots of ways to find hope and connection. Some find it in community. Some want to help others who have been through something similar. Some find joy in the small moments of everyday life.

Hamza stands tall

Hamza lives at home with his Syrian family. Some nights, he slips quietly out the door, seeking the freedom to be himself. One evening, he returns to find an unfamiliar tension in the house. An Imam is sitting in the living room with his parents.

His father speaks first, **“Hamza, we know you are gay. Your uncle showed us a photo of you on social media. You were at an event with other men.”**

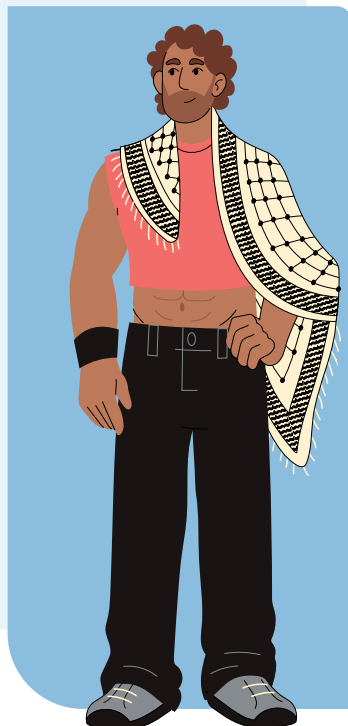
Hamza takes a deep breath. **“I am bisexual, Dad. I like both men and women. In Arabic we say *muzdawij almayl aljinsii* جودزم اليمس الجنسالي.”**

Hamza’s mother looks devastated and cries, **“This is not right! You need to be a good Muslim. You need to get married.”**

The Imam turns to Hamza and says, **“You can be saved. We will study the Qur’an together so you can find your way back.”**

Hamza stands up tall and replies **“What do you mean I can be saved? I do not need to be saved. There is nothing wrong with me. I am proud to be both Muslim and bisexual.”** He looks at the Imam, then at his parents and says, **“I have studied the Qur’an. It does not condemn people who love each other. The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) never punished anyone for being gay, lesbian, or bisexual. The harsh punishments come from people, not from Allah”**

There is silence in the room, heavy but honest. Hamza meets his family’s eyes, hoping they will see his truth: that his faith and his sexuality are both a part of him.



Matthew helps Akinde

Akinde has been trying to change his sexuality for many years. He fasts one day a week. He has lost hope and begins to wonder if there is another way. He looks online and finds a group for people who are happy to be both Christians and LGBTQA. A man called Matthew calls him and they meet up. Akinde says, **“Matthew, I want to tell you my story. I have been trying to change my sexuality for many years. I have tried everything, but nothing works.”**

Matthew replies **“Akinde, this sounds like it might be a conversion practice. Your pastor told you it is wrong to be gay and Christian. It must be really painful to feel like you have to change part of yourself. I understand because I went through this too.”**

Akinde looks like he is about to cry. He says, **“Matthew, I believed God would not accept me. How can you be gay and Christian?”**

“Well, Akinde”, said Matthew, “it took me a long time. I did not believe I could be both. I was in a lot of pain. It helped me to talk to someone who understands. I believe that God loves us as we are. I will be here for you Akinde. Please talk to me anytime. You are not alone and you will get through this.”



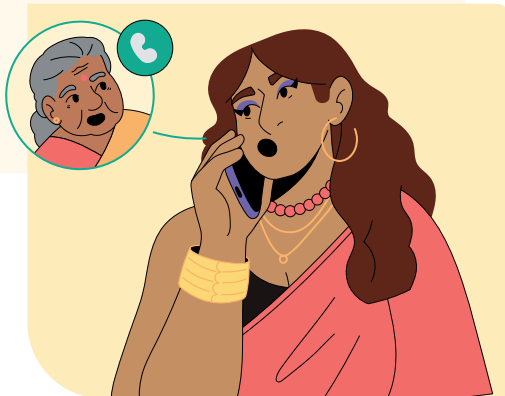
Devi talks with her grandmother

Devi was born in India. Devi's parents proudly announced the birth of a new baby boy. But Devi saw herself as a girl and wanted to be like her sisters. Sometimes, when no one was looking, she would drape a scarf over her shoulders and imagine a different life.

But her father noticed and he told her **"Devi, you bring shame on the family. If you continue to act like this it will affect your sisters' chance of marriage."** One day he made Devi see a religious healer. The healer performed a ritual to heal Devi. Devi sat trembling and wished she could disappear.

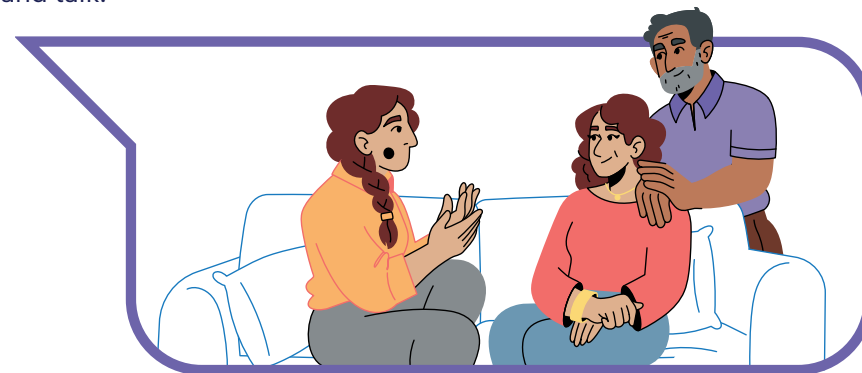
Now, years later Devi lives in Australia. She calls her grandmother in India every week. **"Nani, it was very hard when my father forced me to see the religious healer. I felt so afraid. I am seeing a counsellor in Australia. They told me that what happened was wrong."**

Devi's grandmother looks sad. **"Devi, I am glad I encouraged you to go to Australia. I am happy you can be yourself there."** Devi smiles and says, **"Thank you for supporting me, Nani. I am happy I can be myself."** Nani smiles back through the phone and says, **"You are always my grandchild. I love you just as you are."**



Layla talks with her parents

Fatima tells Layla that she does not have to talk to the Imam. Instead, she asks her to come to the mosque every week and pray with her every day. Layla does this. Several months later, Layla asks her parents to sit down and talk.



Layla: Mum, Dad, there is something important I want to share.

Fatima: Of course, Layla. You know I worry because I want you to have a good life and be a good Muslim. I hope you know I never want to hurt you.

Layla: I know, Mum. I love Islam. My faith is part of who I am, and nothing will ever change that. But I also need you to know that I like girls, and I am still Muslim. I will always be Muslim.

Fatima: How can you be Muslim if you like girls? I was taught it is not possible.

Layla: For a long time, I felt like I had to choose between my faith or my heart. I tried to ignore who I am, but it made me feel broken inside. I could not change this part of me, and it hurt to think I might not belong in our faith.

Layla: What made you feel like you can be both, Layla? How did you find peace?

Layla: I started reading. I learned about Muslims from all over the world who are just like me. I learned that there are different ways to understand Islam. But I also prayed to Allah to help guide me. Allah showed me that I am not broken. Allah made me this way and loves me as I am. I cannot change. That helped me accept myself. I want you to know this part of me, too.

Fatima: I can see you have thought about this a lot. This is still not easy, Layla. But *shukran* (thank you) for letting us into this part of your life.

Layla: I want to help others, too. I want people to know they can be Muslim and have a different sexuality or gender identity. I want other people to know that there is nothing wrong with them. The thing that is wrong is the hatred and fear of people like me. To me, Islam is about spreading love, kindness, and compassion, not fear and punishment.

We all want to belong

People with different sexualities and genders want the same things as everyone else. They want to be accepted for who they are. Many want to practice their faith and they want to feel at home in their culture and community. When they have been hurt and rejected, it can feel like these things are no longer available to them. That loss is real and painful.

People with different sexualities and genders exist in every faith and every culture – they always have. Belonging to a faith, a culture, and a family is not something anyone should have to give up because of who they are. These connections are meaningful. It is important for people to be able to practice their faith and feel like they belong in their culture, family and community. Everyone wants to belong. These things can also help people to stay well.

Question: How important is your faith to you? What would it feel like if someone told you that you can no longer practice it?

People with different sexualities and genders can find ways to live fully as themselves while holding onto their faith and culture. They might read books, religious texts or history and find stories that help them understand themselves. These stories help them know that people like them have always existed. Many find a person or community who accepts them for who they are.

People with different sexualities and gender identities do not need to tell everyone about their identity. Sharing their identity is a personal choice. They might only want to tell a safe person, like a friend, or a close family member they know is safe. That choice belongs to them and deserves to be respected.

Most people want the people they love most to know them for who they really are. Keeping this part of themselves hidden from family or community can be painful. They might be afraid that they will be rejected if they do tell them. It is also painful to feel that their loved ones will miss out on important parts of their lives. When a family member or community member accepts someone, it can change everything for them. This kind of support is very important for a person's wellbeing. We know that support can even save a person's life.

Esther talks with her rabbi

Esther's parents are trying to find her a husband in the Jewish community. She decides to ask her rabbi for help. **"Rabbi Lieberman, my parents want me to get married to a man. They will not give up. But I have a wonderful girlfriend. How can I show them that I am still Jewish and my relationship is good?"**

Rabbi Lieberman thinks carefully and then replies, **"Esther, there is nothing in our religion that condemns you. What you do is between you and God. Above all, the most important thing is that we show love to our fellow Jew. We must love everyone, including you."**



Esther then says, “I cannot tell anyone in the community. They will not accept it.”

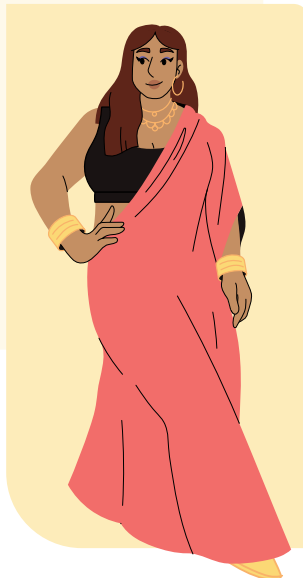
The Rabbi says, “Esther, will you help me write a guide for the shul? We can show the community how to support people like you. You do not have to tell anyone. But I want to show people that it is okay to love someone of the same gender. We know there are others out there who may need support too.”

Devi does research

Devi has been seeing a therapist every week to talk about her experiences. At the start of one of her sessions, her therapist says, “Hi Devi, how is everything going?”

Devi replies, “It has been a long time since I left India. But it still affects me sometimes. The hardest thing about my experience is that my family believed I could not be part of my faith or culture.”

She goes on, “I have been doing some research about transgender people in India. I learned that there are gender variant people called *hijras* or *khwaja siras*. Under the Muslim Mughal Empire they were considered sacred and had respected and influential positions. The struggle started when the British took control. In Hinduism there are gods who are feminine and masculine, and some who are both. It makes me feel proud to be a transgender woman. I named myself Devi because it means goddess. I know that I belong in my faith and culture.”



Hamza laughs with Zainab

“Hi Zainab!” Hamza is catching up with his friend. “You will never guess. I went on a date last night!” Zainab grins and says, “That is so exciting! How did it go?”

Hamza laughs and replies, “It was a disaster. I told him I am Muslim and he said, “How can you be Muslim?” It did not make sense to him at all!”

Zainab sighs and says, “I get it. People think it is hard because my family do not accept me. But honestly, it can be just as hard in LGBTQA communities. Sometimes people do not understand our culture or our faith. They think we must be oppressed or hiding because we are Muslim.”

“Exactly!” says Hamza. “I get tired of explaining myself all the time. People want to put me in a box. Either I am not “queer enough” or I am not “Muslim enough.” But both are who I am. I am Muslim and I am bisexual. I cannot split myself in half.”

Zainab smiles, “I understand, Hamza. My faith, my culture, and my sexuality, they all belong together. They make me whole.”

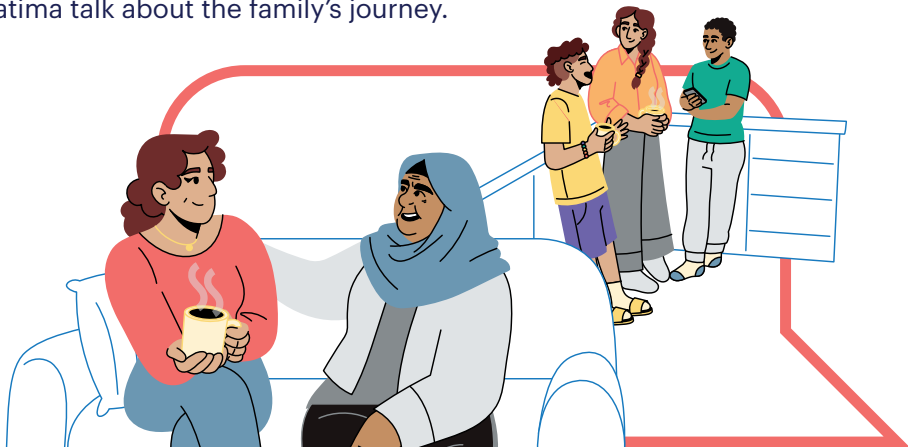
Hamza replies, “I am so glad we have each other, Zainab. It means a lot to talk to someone who understands. We are making our own space where we do not have to explain. Here’s to being ourselves, together!”



Question: Can you think of a time when a family member or friend supported you?

Fatima's family – a few years later

A few years have passed since Fatima first spoke to Mariam. Layla has almost finished university. She wants to be a psychologist and support people like herself. One day, during their afternoon coffee, Mariam and Fatima talk about the family's journey.



Mariam: Fatima, how is Layla going? It has been a long time since you first told me you were worried.

Fatima: Sometimes I still worry about Layla. I want her to have a good life. But Layla always comes to the mosque with me, and she prays with me every day. I know she is a good person.

Mariam: I agree, Fatima. It is okay to not have all the answers. This is a long journey, and it is not over yet.

Fatima: I do not understand everything, but I know I want to protect my children. The best way I can protect Layla is by trying to understand her.

Fatima looks over at her children. They are standing together in the kitchen laughing. Layla says something to her siblings. Fatima looks at her and smiles.

Mariam watches Fatima and smiles as well. She sips her cup of coffee and feels happy surrounded by her family.

What comes next?

You might be at the very beginning of your journey, and that is okay. You do not need to have all the answers right now. It is natural to feel worried, uncertain or unsure about what comes next.

But you are not alone.

The stories in this booklet are based on real conversations with people across different cultural and faith communities. These people have walked this path before you. They, too, have stood where you stand now.

It takes courage simply to begin, to open your heart to the possibility of understanding your child. That courage matters.

Protecting your child and staying connected to them is possible, even when you are still working things out for yourself.

Question: Whatever you are feeling right now, what does staying connected to your child look like for you?

Question: What is one thing you could do this week to show your child that you care?

Question: Who in your life has shown you what it looks like to accept difference?

Glossary

Many LGBTQA people have been told that their language may not even have a word for different sexualities or genders. But within every culture across the world, there are people of diverse sexualities and genders. Some of the terms used in this booklet are listed below, alongside some others. These terms may change over time and in different places.

- In (simplified) Chinese there are words for 女同性恋 *nǚ tóng xìng liàn* / 女同 *nǚ tóng* / 拉拉 *lā lā* (lesbian), 同性恋 *tóng xìng liàn* / 男同 *nán tóng* / 同志 *tóngzhì* (gay), 双性恋 *shuāng xìng liàn* (bisexual), 无性恋 *wú xìng liàn* (asexual) and 跨性别 *kuà xìng bié* (transgender).
- Across Polynesia, individuals assigned male at birth but who embrace and express a feminine identity and/or gender role are *fa'afafine* (Samoa) and *fakaleiti* (Tonga).
- In Vietnamese some words are *đồng tính nữ* (lesbian), *đồng tính nam* (gay), *song tính* (bisexual), and *chuyển giới* (transgender).
- Modern Arabic terms include *mithli* / *mithliyy* مثلي (gay), *mithli al-jins* مثلي الجنس (homosexual), *mithlya* مثلية (lesbian), *muzdawij almayl aljinsii* مزدوج الجنس (bisexual) and *aabir al-jindar* راجل رابع (transgender).

For many more terms, and those used throughout history, please visit:

www.agmc.org.au/publications-lovingyourchild

Resource list

Support for Families and LGBTQA people

- Raising Children Network
www.raisingchildren.net.au
- Parenting hotlines
raisingchildren.net.au/grown-ups/services-support/services-families/helplines
- Rainbow Door
www.rainbowdoor.org.au
- Transcend Australia
www.transcend.org.au

Support for Multicultural LGBTQA people of faith

- AGMC (Australian GLBTIQ Multicultural Council)
www.agmc.org.au
- Switchboard
www.switchboard.org.au/people-of-faith
- Many Coloured Sky
www.manycolouredsky.org
- Forcibly Displaced People Network
www.fdpn.org.au/
- Culturally diverse LGBTQIA support services and groups
au.reachout.com/identity/sexuality/lgbtqi-support-services-and-groups

More information about conversion practices

- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)
www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/change-or-suppression-practices

To report conversion practices

- (VEOHRC)
www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/change-or-suppression-practices/reporting-practices

A full list of other Multicultural, multifait and LGBTIQA support and other services can be found at: www.agmc.org.au/publications-lovingyourchild

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Percy Gurtler (author)

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