

Story 3 Transcript

“In many ways I don’t really have a story to tell. I hesitate to use the word “affirming” as we are still on a journey with this, but my children have grown up in a home and in a local Baptist Church, which have tried over the last 20 plus years to be inclusive, especially in terms of sexuality and gender.”

As a parent I have tried hard to not to promote gender stereotypes (for example by trying to dress my children in gender neutral colours and styles) and to normalise being gay as much as possible. However, this feels like a drop in the ocean compared to the messages they are bombarded with every day from school, friends, social media and the wider culture of which we are a part.

I do remember going to my friends’ church blessing of their civil partnership when my daughter was quite young and afterwards finding her in the pop-up tent in the garden playing at weddings with two brides and having that rare feeling as a parent of getting it right. But hearing my daughter talk now of the struggle she has gone through in terms of questioning her own identity and sexuality, clearly as a parent I haven’t done as much as I could have to support her, simply because I didn’t know how. I wonder if this is partly because I had assumed from my left wing, liberal perspective, that for our millennial generation, gender and sexuality are more fluid and that there is a greater acceptance of the LGBTQ+ community and therefore there really shouldn’t be a need to have to “come out”. Clearly, listening to my daughter, my assumptions were wrong. Understanding and defining your own sexual identity is clearly still of extreme importance, as is being networked in to the wider LGBTQ+ community for affirmation and support.

I had a very difficult conversation I felt I had to have with my daughter a few years ago as I told her, with a lot of pain on my part, that the wider Baptist world are not as affirming as the church she has grown up in. This has been especially difficult for me as I have been very involved in Baptist structures and in teaching, including in the areas of gender and sexuality. Despite this and my daughter having chosen to be baptised at the age of 13, I think she is now what I’d describe as post-church and I can quite understand why.

But being the mum of an older teen who has now come out as gay/queer has been liberating for me in terms of exploring my own understanding of sexuality and gender and has encouraged me to look beyond the binary social constructions of gender and sexuality that I was brought up with and to learn more about who I am and how I express myself. It has also blown my mind in terms of how and what I teach is an exciting place to be.

I know of other parents who would have very similar stories. I also know of others which are much more painful for both the parents and their child, so I don’t want to play down the many issues that other families have had to, and do, face. But as for me - I have a beautiful, confident, politically active and very creative daughter who has a fantastic group of friends and gets amazing support from being part of the LGBTQ+ community – I couldn’t be prouder!