


Storytelling Toolkit: Family Counselors & Therapists

Providing Alternative Narratives to
Families Struggling With LGBT Issues



I'm From Driftwood

THE LGBTQ STORY ARCHIVE



"Seeing the tough times that she's been going through because of her being gay, it hurts but I just support her and I'm behind her and I tell her 'You know, things are going to work out. You be who you are. Don't pretend that you're something else.' **And that's how we worked it out.**"

- Josie

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Struggling With LGBT Issues

by

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Stories enrich, empower, and even save lives. People use stories to relate to each other, to share experiences and create a sense of community. I'm From Driftwood uses storytelling and first-person narratives to send a simple yet powerful message to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) people everywhere: you are not alone.

I'm From Driftwood is an archive of first-person stories from LGBTQ people from all walks of life.

Our original mission was to help LGBTQ youth, but we soon realized our stories had potential for a much broader impact. People of all different ages, backgrounds, communities, and cultures have contacted us to say that our stories changed their lives for the better. We have helped teens to come out, helped families to accept their gay kids, and helped all kinds of people increase their empathy and understanding of the LGBTQ community. All through the power of storytelling.

Intuitively we knew that our storytelling was having an impact, but our work with Dr. Jacqueline Hudak helped us to realize how our stories were actually working: we are providing alternative narratives to people who don't have them.

Dr. Hudak stumbled upon I'm From Driftwood and began using our stories in her work. She found the video stories were very helpful for many of her clients struggling with LGBTQ issues. Based on Dr. Hudak's success, we were inspired to create this Storytelling Toolkit, which is designed to help you tap into the power of storytelling to help your clients. With Dr. Hudak's assistance, we have identified stories in our archive that can help many LGBTQ people and their families.

I hope this Storytelling Toolkit is a useful resource for you, and that you receive as much positive feedback from your clients as I have from visitors to the I'm From Driftwood site. Please share your feedback, ideas and questions – we'd love to hear from you!

Best,
Nathan Manske



As a Family Therapist I have a deep connection with the power of story. I spent the better part of my days in collaboration with others to help craft cohesive narratives of their lives.

Stories inform us, and shape what we believe possible.

Some stories are silenced, even dangerous in the telling. Thus has it been for those who do not conform to the heterosexual standard: the love that dare not speak its name.

Recent civil rights victories for LGBTQ relationships, though positive, are largely bound by geography and culture. I see families struggle every day to maintain connection when they are challenged to integrate a narrative about gender or sexuality that does not fit neatly into the still dominant story of a gender binary and heterosexuality.

In this packet you will find a beautiful map, quilted from the stories of lives lived outside the bounds of heterosexuality. Partners, parents, children and grandparents share their stories, and we are enriched by them all.

That is not to say that they all have happy endings.

Whatever is unnamed, undepicted in images, whatever is omitted from biography, censored in collections of letters, whatever is misnamed as something else, made difficult-to-come-by, whatever is buried in the memory by the collapse of meaning under an inadequate or lying language - this will become, not merely unspoken, but unspeakable.

- Adrienne Rich

Sincerely,
Jacqueline Hudak

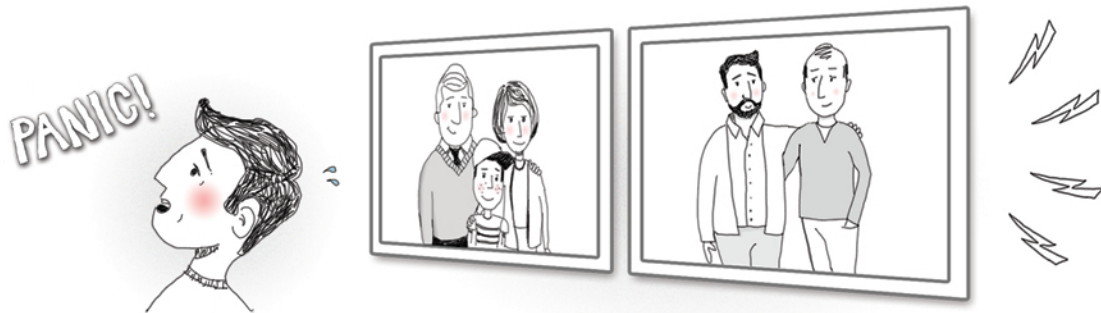
Alternative Narratives: The Cure for Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity is “the dominant and pervasive belief that a viable family consists of a heterosexual mother and a father raising heterosexual children together.” (Gamson, 2000) If the only narrative a person sees in their lifetime is a heterosexual couple raising a heterosexual child, that is what they will perceive as the only acceptable option.



When presented with a life scenario that doesn't fit the heterosexual mold, that person often resists the scenario or perceives it as wrong.

[H]eteronormativity renders the diversity of human sexuality and identities invisible. This invisibility is marked by the fact that there is limited language to describe sexual minority experience and identities within dominant discourses. This creates a category of “other” in our culture, which is rendered invalid or pathological. (Hudak and Giammattei, 2012)



Alternative narratives allow people to understand that their experience is not completely unique and is, in fact, normal. After being bombarded with exclusively heteronormative narratives, people who are exposed to alternative narratives, particularly through storytelling, can more easily accept situations outside the perceived norm.



ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVES

Provide your client with an alternative narrative that best fits their current situation. It might also help to show your client some stories that don't exactly match their situation to show that many families go through different struggles but still find a way to move forward in a positive way.

- Parents struggling to accept their lesbian, gay, or bisexual child
- Parents struggling to accept their transgender child
- Parent coming out to spouse or child
- Child coming out to parent
- Family facing LGBT issues together

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE: PARENTS STRUGGLING TO ACCEPT THEIR LESBIAN, GAY, OR BISEXUAL CHILD



Transcript

Josie: The way I found out about my daughter was that she went out one night and I was very angry. The next morning is when she came out and told me she was gay. And I didn't accept it at first.

Carissa: My brother had ended up taking me out because it was going to be my Sweet Sixteen, so he wanted to show me a good time. And I met up with this girl and we ended up just hanging out, and they dropped us off in the alley the next morning and we went home and my mom, she came in and we told her some fake story. She fell for it a little bit and we thought we were all good but then my sister came and she went inside and told my mom what really had happened. I guess it was her friend that I had ended up being with that night. Then my mom came out there and asked if she could talk to me. She sat down at the table and she asked me if what my sister had told her was true. I told her that it was true and she went crazy from there. She got all mad.

Josie: I was really angry. Throwing plates and telling her I disowned her and it was overwhelming thinking that my daughter's not going to heaven, she's going to die with AIDS, and all this other stuff that people put into your brain and you just don't know how to accept it. And for people to say, "Well, what are you going to do? How are you going to change her?" I was confused and when I started telling my friend all this, he said, "You can't change her, she's who she is and God made everybody different." I'm like, "Yeah, I know God made everybody different, but she's my daughter, you know?!" We just talked about it for a long time. It was just really hurtful at the time. I just love my daughter, no matter what. And right now, she's going through a lot with her dad and it hurts. When people put your kids down, no matter what they are, they're still my kids, you know? And seeing the tough times that she's been going through because of her being gay, it hurts but I just support her and I'm behind her and I tell her "You know, things are going to work out. You be who you are. Don't pretend that you're something else." And that's how we worked it out.

Carissa: It brought us a lot closer too, because we didn't really talk as much and when she became more immune to it, it brought us closer, I'd go to her talk instead of just a friend or something. And I just started talking to her. It brought us a lot closer.

Similar Stories:

- Dad learns to accept gay son. [Watch.](#)
- Dad accepts gay son, defends from bullies. [Watch.](#)
- [Watch more stories like these.](#)

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE: ACCEPTING A TRANSGENDER FAMILY MEMBER OR SPOUSE



Transcript

My name is RoxAnne Moore. I live in Grand Forks. I've lived here most of my life. We have two kids. Cory is an FTM transgender, was born Michelle Lynn Moore, approximately five years ago began to transition as a male.

When people meet us now they always tell us that we seem so awesome and that we seem so accepting. I would be the first to tell you that its not been easy. Both of us were raised Catholic and have lived in the Midwest, small town Midwest, where assumed heterosexuality is the norm. So when Shelly first came out to us as a lesbian it was very difficult for us. It brought me up short, because I always thought I was this really open minded accepting person and I watched Oprah shows and Phil Donahue shows on gay people and I thought "that's fine." What I didn't realize is it was fine with me, but just not my kid, at first, and that brought me up real short.

So we got involved in PFLAG and I did a lot of reading, self educating. **The one thing that never did waiver is I never stopped loving my child. That was my child.** I had a problem with the homosexuality at first, just because of my background teachings. And I'm somewhat ashamed to admit that but Cory always tells me I'm really hard on myself, that there's horror stories out there compared to (ours). It was difficult.

The first relationship that Cory was in we were going on a little vacation to the lake and we had this go around on the phone. He wanted, she wanted, it's difficult, because it's he now, but it was she at that time. Wanted to bring Donna and I said fine, but I don't want to see any open displays of affection and then Cory came back with, "Well, that's not who I am, that's not who I was raised to be." I said okay, I said I'm just not ready for that! I said, "Tell you what, daddy and I won't be affectionate either. How bout that?" We did not even get 3 hours in to our little vacation before I decided – forget it! forget it! forget it! It was too hard and it really taught me the lesson of why should we expect gay people not to be able to express their affection in public when we so easily can do that?

So that was a good lesson learned.

Similar Stories:

- Spouse changes gender, couple stays together. [Watch.](#)
- Dad accepts trans son "You're still mine." [Watch.](#)
- Parents evolve on accepting trans son. [Watch.](#)

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE: PARENT COMING OUT TO SPOUSE OR CHILD



Transcript

My name is Gill, I'm From Palm Springs, I'm a middle-aged guy, I came out 15 years ago so I'm still an adolescent as far as my gay life down here. That being said, I'm partnered very happily and that's after coming out of a long-term straight marriage of 28 years.

Going back 15 years ago I thought I was happy having the big house and the car and the vacations and the perfect relationship and social life, but something was missing. And I had something of a catharsis when I finally reached the fact that I knew I was different, that I was attracted to men but never acted on it. And I remember being in therapy and discussing those desires and my therapist said, "Until you take that step across that line and act upon it, it's just a concept." And it came to me as taking that step 15 years ago, going to a fundraiser in the city with a very good friend from the office and I knew he was gay. And we kind of chatted, he came out to me, which I had known, and I remember driving back across the Bay Bridge, I was living in the East Bay at the time, and thinking, "Wow, this is a pivotal point, it's a point where the paradigm can certainly shift." And I remember going home and then kind of coming out to him which was my kind of story down there. Well then of course everything has consequences. That eventually led to the demise of my marriage. It was the complete deconstruction of my life, I describe it as. I had to rebuild emotionally, my family, financially, had to build all over again.

But it wasn't just my story, it was my wife's story and her reaction to it. She knew something was going on because I was going to these meetings of a gay group of married men. And when I told her, I used the term back then that I was bisexual, that was an easier transition for me. And I remember her reaction was that she was devastated. She was devastated. Because if it was another woman she might have been able to fight for that, but the fact that I was attracted to men she couldn't compete for that. After I discussed it with my wife, we had the children over and I wrote each of them a letter. And I gave them the letter, that was my daughter, her husband, and my son, they were all adults at that point. And I went into the bedroom and they came in afterwards. My daughter put her arm around me and said, "Dad, we were so afraid you were going to tell us you had cancer." And in that light, being gay was okay.

Similar Stories:

- Dad comes out to wife and kids. [Watch.](#)
- Wife comes out to husband and daughter. [Watch.](#)
- Family strengthens after Dad comes out. [Watch.](#)

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE: CHILD COMING OUT TO PARENT



Transcript

One day I was getting ready for school and my mom said, you know, that we need to sit down and talk. And I thought, uh oh, something could be wrong. So we started talking and she said, "You know, son, it's okay. I know." Those were the first words out of her mouth. And I thought, well, I know I didn't get in trouble from any of my teachers from talking too much so I'm wondering what's going on here? And she started putting two and two together and she said, "You know, son, it's okay, I know you're gay." And the tears starting flowing from me and her, and I asked her, "How did you know?" And she goes, "Well, a mother always knows." But more importantly, by the friends I started surrounding myself with, and some of them being gay and some of them being straight. But to make a long story short, the most important thing she said from that conversation is, at the end of the day, we're your family and we've got your back and we love you and we support you. So I knew that I would be alright. The next hardest thing was, she was like, "Okay, you now need to tell your dad." And I was like, "Uh oh." I waited a little bit on that. I had to find a place where I knew he would feel comfortable, and that was at Hooters of all places, you know, my parents are divorced, my dad loves Hooters, for the wings and the beer of course.

So we were sitting down talking and he could tell I was nervous and he said, "Son, is everyone okay?" And I was like, "Well, yes..." And he said, "Well, are you sure?" And I said, "Absolutely." And I said, "Dad, I'm gay." And he said, "Okay...I kind of figured. But I think I'm gonna need a beer on this one." Because it's one thing to kind of know and to have it verbalized is something else. And I think the most heart-warming thing I took away from that was when my dad looked around the room and said, "Alright, son, tell me, what's your kind of guy?" And I literally, like, froze and said, "Dad, we can't be having this conversation." And he said, "No, it's okay, I need to know what type of guy my son is into so if I ever find someone who's of quality, I can introduce you to." So I said, you know, blond haired, blue eyed... And we kind of left it at that and enjoyed our wings and everything like that.

So I think my story is pretty cool. You know, I have a loving and supporting family and it showed that a lot of the stress that I had, a lot of the insecurities that I had, were all self-induced. You know, you're afraid of coming out to your parents thinking they might not take it so well when in fact they took it really well and showed a lot of love and support, so it was cool.

Similar Stories:

- Coming out as bisexual. [Watch.](#)
- Coming out as a lesbian saved my life. [Watch.](#)
- Identifying as "queer". [Watch.](#)

All stories in this packet can be seen at imfromdriftwood.com/family

ALTERNATIVE NARRATIVE: FAMILIES FACING LGBT ISSUES TOGETHER



Transcript

Reagan: We've been working on helping Mathias, our son, who's fifteen. He came out when he was 11 and just finally had the courage to share that with both of us. He couldn't actually articulate it so he wrote it down on a little scratch of paper and handed it to his dad.

Ronny: I've always told him that he could talk to us about anything. And especially me, and he was a little apprehensive, but once he gave me the note I want to reassure him that no matter what, whether he's gay, African American, tall, short, slim, larger, he's my son and I love him. And I would want to support him no matter what.

Mathias: We had some difficult issues with some of the kids and the environment at school. The main concerns were with some of the dialogue that was said about me: "homo" and "fag" and not nice words at all. The fact that they were being used to project on me even though they didn't even know me was scary enough. That they were taking time out of their day to just totally ruin mine.

Ronny: One day he came home and said some kids were giving him a hard time. He came home and told us and as soon as I heard what he said I told my wife, "Let's go! We're going to go talk to those kids and find out who's doing this, and why they are doing that."

Mathias: I'd actually been coming home from this thing called Bench Practice. And we'd been walking home and I believe this was by one of the African Americans that was in the car at the time, he said I was a disgrace to all black people. Which is like, okay, well, just blow them off and we came home.

Ronny: So I went out there and talked to the kids and found out two of the kids were football players on the team and after I talked to them for a little bit and said, "Just listen, man, my son's a freshman, he's kind of new to the school. He's not used to what's going on. Can you guys look out for him and make sure he's okay?" He said, "Yes, no problem." You know it was just as simple as that, just talking to the kids, so that just shows that there's so many kids out there just willing to help. All you have to do is sometimes just talk to them and say something. So that made me feel so much better.

Similar Stories:

- Mom and son confront bullies. [Watch.](#)
- Grandpa offers sage advice on bullying. [Watch.](#)

All stories in this packet can be seen at imfromdriftwood.com/family

FEEDBACK

I'm From Driftwood is creating additional Storytelling Toolkits and wants to make improvements based on your feedback. If this Toolkit helped you or your clients in any way, or if you can think of ways to improve the Toolkit, please send an email to nathan@imfromdriftwood.com with "Toolkit Feedback" in the subject headline.

REFERENCES:

Gamson, J. (2000). Sexualities, queer theory, and qualitative research. In N. Denzin & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed.). (pp. 347-365). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Hudak, J. and Giammattei, S. (2012). Doing Family: Decentering Heteronormativity in 'Marriage' and 'Family' Therapy. (p. 4).

SUPPORT

I'm From Driftwood is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization. If this packet helped you in any way, please consider making a donation to I'm From Driftwood at:

www.imfromdriftwood.com/support

Or by mailing a check to:

I'm From Driftwood
126 South 8th St., #3
Brooklyn, NY 11249

RESOURCES



Every day, The Trevor Project saves young lives through its accredited, free and confidential phone, instant message and text messaging crisis intervention services. A leader and innovator in suicide prevention, The Trevor Project offers the largest safe social networking community for LGBTQ youth, best practice suicide prevention educational trainings, resources for youth and adults, and advocacy initiatives.

www.thetrevorproject.org



Founded in 1972 with the simple act of a mother publicly supporting her gay son, PFLAG is the nation's largest family and ally organization. Uniting people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) with families, friends, and allies, PFLAG is committed to advancing equality and full societal affirmation of LGBTQ people through its threefold mission of support, education, and advocacy.

PFLAG has over 350 chapters and 200,000 members and supporters crossing multiple generations of American families in major urban centers, small cities, and rural areas in all 50 states.

This vast grassroots network is cultivated, resourced, and serviced by PFLAG National, located in Washington, D.C., the National Board of Directors and 13 Regional Directors.

www.community.pflag.org/



The Family Acceptance Project™ is a research, intervention, education and policy initiative that works to prevent health and mental health risks for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) children and youth, including suicide, homelessness and HIV – in the context of their families. We use a research-based, culturally grounded approach to help ethnically, socially and religiously diverse families to support their LGBT children.

Our team has been putting research into practice by developing an evidence-based family model of wellness, prevention and care to strengthen families and promote positive development and healthy futures for LGBT children and youth. We provide training and consultation on our family-based prevention and intervention approach across the U.S. and in other countries.

<http://familyproject.sfsu.edu/>



Family Equality Council connects, supports, and represents the three million parents who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer in this country and their six million children. We are changing attitudes and policies to ensure that all families are respected, loved, and celebrated—including families with parents who are LGBTQ. We are a community of parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren that reaches across this country. For 30 years we have raised our children and raised our voices toward fairness for all families.

<http://www.familyequality.org/>

CREDITS

I'M FROM DRIFTWOOD

I'm From Driftwood aims to help LGBTQ people learn more about their community, straight people learn more about their neighbors and everyone learn more about themselves through the power of storytelling and story sharing.

The stories increase empathy and empower individuals by creating an apolitical forum for LGBTQ stories from every age, race, gender, background and culture. The stories deepen our understanding of each other, preserve history, and open hearts and minds.

THE PALETTE FUND

The Palette Fund focuses on the LGBT Community, Nutrition & Wellness, and Patient Navigation. Rand committed his heart and soul to his philanthropic work throughout his life, and The Palette Fund seeks to continue and grow his pioneering vision. The Palette Fund was formed by Rand Harlan Skolnick many years prior to his death but was not turned into a working foundation until 2009. The name "Palette" came from the restaurant in Los Angeles where Rand and his best friend Peter Benassi first met back in the late 1970's. They were set up on a blind date and were best friends ever since.

The name also contains other relevant connotations, such as an artist's palette, which provides the beginnings for bringing joy and beauty to others.

During his battle with Pancreatic Cancer, Rand asked his partner Terrence Meck and best friend Peter to take the reigns of the foundation and continue what he started. Today, Terrence serves as Co-founder and President while Peter serves as the Board Chair. Together, they hope that Rand's legacy will continue not only through their own lifetimes, but for generations to come.

ARCUS FOUNDATION

The ultimate goal of the Social Justice program is to ensure that individuals and families around the world of every sexual orientation and gender identity are able to live their lives with dignity and respect, and express their love and sense of self.

Arcus' U.S. social justice strategy works at the intersection of sexual/gender justice, racial justice, and economic justice, investing primarily in youth, communities of color, and targeted faith communities, with special priority for youth of color, transgender populations, and work by and for affected communities. The foundation invests in impactful culture, leadership, and protections for LGBT youth and communities of color.

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