

Pride365+



Love doesn't have to be inherited — it can be chosen.



Chosen family

Family isn't one-size-fits-all

Family is often described as the people we're born to. But for many people — especially LGBTQ+ individuals — family is something we build. It's made up of the people who show up, who listen and who care deeply about our safety and happiness. This is what's known as chosen family.

Chosen family can be friends, mentors, teachers, neighbors, coaches, co-workers or community members. They are the people who make us feel seen and valued. They are the ones who say, "You belong here — and mean it."

Chosen family isn't "less than" biological family. It is a real family, rooted in care, trust and mutual respect.

Chosen family can be life-saving

Sometimes, it only takes one person to make a difference. Research shows that having just one accepting adult in an LGBTQ+ young person's life — such as a teacher, coach, relative or mentor — can significantly reduce the risk of a suicide attempt. One safe relationship can change the course of someone's life.

That adult may not share a last name. They may never be called “mom” or “dad,” but their presence, care and belief matter just as much. Chosen family teaches an important truth: Love doesn't have to be inherited — it can be chosen.



Where chosen family is found

Chosen family often grows naturally in spaces where people feel safe to be themselves. These spaces might include:

- School clubs like Gender & Sexuality Alliances (GSAs)
- LGBTQ+ youth groups or community centers
- Faith or cultural groups that are affirming
- Sports teams, arts communities or volunteer groups
- Online communities designed to be safe, moderated and supportive

For some, online spaces are especially meaningful — particularly when local support is limited. Carefully moderated LGBTQ+ forums and youth networks can offer connection, understanding, and a powerful sense of belonging.

No matter where it's found, chosen family begins with acceptance — and grows through consistency and care.



The role of allies in chosen family

Allies often become part of chosen family, sometimes without realizing it. A friend who checks in. A co-worker who speaks up. A teacher who listens without judgment. These actions communicate safety.

Many LGBTQ+ people report experiencing harassment or discrimination — but having a supportive friend in those moments can make all the difference. Knowing someone “has your back” builds resilience and helps people feel less alone.

Being part of someone's chosen family doesn't require having the perfect words. It simply requires showing up with respect, empathy and a willingness to learn.





Biological family still matters — and can grow

While chosen family is essential, biological family acceptance can also be incredibly powerful. Research consistently shows that LGBTQ+ young people who feel accepted by parents or caregivers experience better mental health outcomes.

For parents and caregivers, support doesn't mean having everything figured out. It means listening, learning and offering unconditional love.

For young people who feel safe doing so, sharing resources with family members can sometimes open doors. Some parents need time, education and reassurance — but love can grow.

And when it doesn't, chosen family is there.



Community belonging saves lives

Belonging doesn't stop at individuals — it extends to schools, neighborhoods and communities. LGBTQ+ people who live in affirming environments and attend inclusive schools experience better mental health and lower suicide risk.

Inclusive policies, anti-bullying efforts, affirming spaces and visible signs of acceptance all reinforce a simple but powerful message: You matter.

Whether it's a club, a group of friends, an online forum or a supportive workplace, finding a community where you can be your authentic self is deeply protective.



Family is who shows up

Family is not defined by biology alone. It's defined by love, safety and care.

Chosen family reminds us that everyone deserves to belong — and that belonging can be built, one relationship at a time. If you're still searching for your people, know this: Your family may not look like what you were taught to expect, but it is no less real or meaningful.

And if you're someone who offers acceptance to another person, you may already be part of their chosen family — whether you know it or not.

Belonging changes lives. Chosen family makes it possible.



Visit pride365plus.com for more information on additional LGBTQ+ resources

To connect with more resources, visit optumwellbeing.com.

Sources

The Trevor Project. [National survey on LGBTQ youth mental health](#). 2023.

The Trevor Project. [Research brief: Accepting adults and suicide risk among LGBTQ youth](#).

Mental Health America. [LGBTQ+ communities and mental health](#).

PFLAG National. [Support for families, allies, and people who are LGBTQ+](#).

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To reach a trained crisis counselor, call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline (previously known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) at **988** or **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**. You may also text 988 or chat at 988lifeline.org. The Lifeline provides 24/7 free and confidential support.

This program should not be used for emergency or urgent care needs. In an emergency, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room. This program is not a substitute for a doctor's or professional's care. Consult with your clinician for specific health care needs, treatment or medication. Due to the potential for a conflict of interest, legal consultation will not be provided on issues that may involve legal action against Optum or its affiliates, or any entity through which the caller is receiving these services directly or indirectly (e.g., employer or health plan). This program and its components may not be available in all states or for all group sizes and is subject to change. Coverage exclusions and limitations may apply.

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