

Dementia and the LGBTQ Community:

*Knowing some of the social history may make a difference in helping support this community
by Reverend Linn Possell, PAC Speaker and Lead Mentor*

We need physical, emotional, and spiritual connection to live a life of well-being because we, as social beings, are hardwired for connection. Family therapist Virginia Satir once said, “We need **four hugs** a day for survival. We need **eight hugs** a day for maintenance. We need **twelve hugs** a day for growth.” Brené Brown states that in the absence of authentic connection we suffer. Authentic connection means the kind of connection that doesn’t require us to be hustling for acceptance and changing who we are to fit in. People who are Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning (LGBTQ) require the same connection as the heterosexual and/or cisgender community, but they often have another piece that they are dealing with, and this comes from the part of society that claims that they are wrong. People who identify as LGBTQ have often been considered less than other people because of their sexuality. This can create shame for people who are LGBTQ. Brené Brown also states that shame can unravel connection in a split second. Shame has been something that has been front and center for many people who are LGBTQ.

Viewing someone as different or “other” in a negative way stems from not fully understanding that person or group of people. People who are marginalized by society, discriminated against, will have more stress, more illness, and lowered brain health. Therefore, in this article I would like to give you a little insight into what some in this community have lived. In the LGBTQ community, you will find people living the same kind of lives that are lived in the heterosexual and/or cisgender community. What you may not know are some of the struggles that people in this community have lived with and what has been part of their history. In Positive Approach® to Care, we talk about knowing the person’s social history, so let me share with you some of the things that may be or have been part of the social history of someone who is LGBTQ, in hopes that this awareness will help you better support the person, their spouse, or family.

In 2015, the Supreme Court voted that to marry was a fundamental right, and therefore, people in the LGBTQ community could legally marry. It wasn’t until 2015 when unions of committed relationships were acknowledged. Because of this vote, spouses in this community could now be on their partner’s medical insurance and receive life insurance benefits, as well as the other rights that married couples have. Think about the things that are taken for granted that happen when you are married—getting to see your loved one in ICU, having parental rights to your children, death benefits, not having to apply as individuals on your mortgage, etc.

As clergy, I have been at the bedside of people who are dying when their partner has not been allowed in the room because they were not considered next of kin. As clergy, I have testified in court that the non-biological parent should have the right to raise

his/her child after the death of the biological parent. I have attended and officiated funerals where the family either did not invite or acknowledge the surviving partner. The LGBTQ community has been fighting for equal human rights for many years.

I have led candle light vigils for hate crimes and led the procession down the streets of Orlando so the families who were burying their children from the Pulse shooting did not have to come into contact with protestors. These families loved and supported their children, some do not. When some people in the LGBTQ community come out, they are sometimes ostracized by their families and kicked out of their homes. This is another thing to consider, that for many people in the LGBTQ community **and** their families, coming out is not a one-time event but can happen every day. With each new person, event, or situation, the question of whether to come out to this new person, group of people, or at a new event surfaces. “Will they accept me? Will it change my opportunity to be treated fairly? Will they respect me? Will I still belong?” And yes, I said families too. Families struggle with coming out to their friends, other family members, work associates, etc....because the stigma of being “other” can happen to the family as well.

On our website there are [two recorded webinars](#) on this topic that may be of help to you. What these webinars illustrate is that we tend to put people who are part of a subculture or considered to be “other” into boxes and allow this to cloud our perspective. Looking at the person as a whole being who is multifaceted and whose life is fluid and not stuck in one stereotype or box will be of utmost importance as we try to support them in their life.

If someone you know is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, or Questioning, it will be, as with anyone, important to understand their social history, and to acknowledge them as whole. Treat the person and their spouse as any committed, loving couple, and you will see relief, gratitude, and mutual respect in return.