

A COMING OUT GUIDE

FOR CANADA'S INDO-CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

FIRST EDITION



EPIC

Equality and Pride for Indo-Caribbeans
by Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association

AUTHOR'S NOTE

However you may have come across this Guide, whether you're going through a tumultuous time preparing to come-out for the very first time or you're simply vetting this resource to send to a friend, I want you to know that you have an entire community of people who care and want the absolute best for you here at the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association.

For the sake of text space, I will often refer to the very many identities that make up the 2SLGBTQIA+ community as Queer. I do not intend to erase any of these complex identities by doing so, nor do I believe this term represents every person in the community, however, I've been graciously tasked with encapsulating the magic that is queerness into the boundaries of this Canva (which is a pretty big feat!).

Nonetheless, as a Queer-Guyanese woman myself, I truly believe each of us are a gift to this world and I hope to convey that message through this resource. I'm extremely proud of how this Guide is coming together and I want to thank the EPIC team for trusting my vision.

I want to offer my extended gratitude to the unceded and unsundered Anishinabe Algonquin territory where I am creating this Guide, to my family who love me unconditionally, to my friends for navigating queerness alongside me and for showing me what community is, to the love of my life who has loved me in my entirety from the moment we met, to my ancestors who protect my every breath, to my fellow activists, leaders, healers, and storytellers who keep our community alive and well, to anyone I may have left out, but say a prayer for every night, and to you, the reader, I thank you dearly.

Sincerely,

Adaleide Kisson

Project Coordinator,
Equality and Pride for Indo-Caribbean (EPIC)
by the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association
she/they



CHAIR'S NOTE

The work that we do at the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association is driven by the mandate of amplifying and empowering Canada's Indo-Caribbean community. Within the spirit of this mandate, we established EPIC - Equality and Pride for Indo-Caribbeans.

EPIC was launched on International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia (IDAHOTB) in 2022. This was symbolic but important as we recognized the dire need to combat hate, discrimination, and violence within our own community. Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ Indo-Caribbean individuals live in fear and cannot express their true authentic selves. We felt it necessary to add EPIC to our mission, doing our part to educate the community, build safe spaces, and break down barriers.

During my tenure as the Chair of the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association, I've given many speeches about our work. The constant theme I provided is that we must leverage the opportunities we have as a community in Canada to move beyond archaic mentalities and break free from the remnants of colonialism. The journey of our ancestors to a new land during indentureship, and then again in recent times through our parents, grandparents, or ourselves, was meant to seek a better life, a life of freedom and prosperity for future generations. Part of that is ensuring that our generation, here in Canada, can seek the ultimate freedom of being themselves and not face persecution.

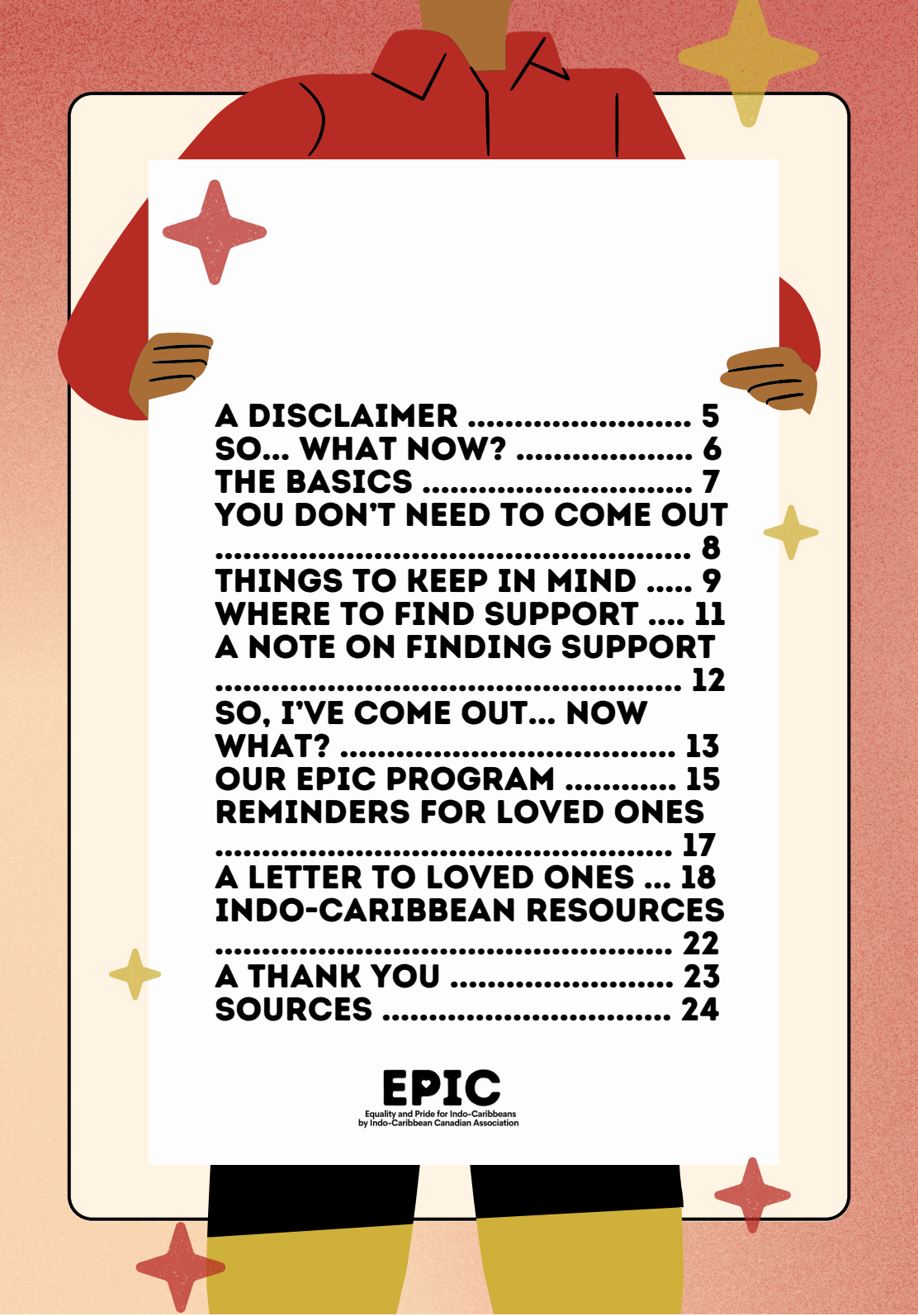
I want to thank Adaleide for her work in composing this Guide. I hope that this work will ensure that members of Canada's Indo-Caribbean community who identify as LGBTQ+ can find liberation and safety, something that our ancestors fought for.

Sincerely,

Ryan Singh
Chair,
Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association
he/him



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by Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association



A DISCLAIMER	5
SO... WHAT NOW?	6
THE BASICS	7
YOU DON'T NEED TO COME OUT	8
THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND	9
WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT	11
A NOTE ON FINDING SUPPORT	12
SO, I'VE COME OUT... NOW WHAT?	13
OUR EPIC PROGRAM	15
REMINDERS FOR LOVED ONES	17
A LETTER TO LOVED ONES ...	18
INDO-CARIBBEAN RESOURCES	22
A THANK YOU	23
SOURCES	24

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Equality and Pride for Indo-Caribbeans
by Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association

A DISCLAIMER

At the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association, our utmost concern is always the safety and wellbeing of our community.

This Guide is meant to support your personal coming out journey, alongside a plethora of other supports (including professional resources, your existing support system etc.).

We do not intend to push you towards any particular choices or decisions, but rather hope that you will leverage the information in this Guide to make informed decisions, which keep your safety and well-being at the forefront.

We do not claim to be experts on any of these topics, nor are we qualified to be giving mental health advice, therefore please seek help should you find yourself experiencing harm or abuse of any kind.

When necessary, we have linked to mental health resources and professionals, and have thoroughly researched to inform this resource.

We'll be including a master list of all sources consulted at the end for those of you who would like to read more.

As always, if any of you have questions, or concerns or would like to follow up on anything specific that we have included, please do not hesitate to reach out.

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SO... WHAT NOW?

So, you've been feeling like *maayybee* you aren't straight.

First and foremost, I want you to know that's completely okay and nothing to be ashamed of.

Especially if you grew up in a traditional Indo-Caribbean household, like most of us have, this new-found sense of identity can feel anywhere between problematic to a near-death sentence, but I promise you are so valid and so seen.

As you read through this Guide, know that you belong here and you deserve the freedom to explore your identity and live as your truest self - whatever that looks like for you.

I want to start by recommending some resources that cover 'the basics'.



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I would also like to highlight the amazing resource page compiled by Pflag Toronto which includes tons of videos on 'the basics', a list of support groups for parents, local 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations, tidbits on legal matters, and a very detailed glossary of terms which could be extremely helpful to look over if you/your loved one is using terminology you're unfamiliar with.

One of the biggest gifts we can offer ourselves and/or loved ones is to learn about what's important to them.

The Trevor Project has put together an incredible handbook explaining the basics of sex, gender, gender orientation and more that could be extremely useful if you aren't familiar with these terms and their differences.

This is a great place to start if you're completely new to the idea of homosexuality and Queerness as a whole.

Remember, there's no shame in not knowing, only shame in refusing to learn!

It's important to make sure we have a good understanding of these concepts in order to move onto more nuanced learning.



YOU DON'T NEED TO “COME OUT”



Despite the title of this Guide, I want to share with you a resource that may bring you some comfort as you are coming into this part of yourself and trying to figure out what to do next.

There can be a lot of pressure to come out and have it be received well, whether it be from external things like media or internal like wanting to update your loved ones on this huge development in your life.

Wherever you're feeling this pressure from, if you are at all, I want you to know that your identity is real and valid whether you choose to be visibly Queer and invite others into your space or not.

[This Instagram post](#) by marigoldseedscollective puts it perfectly, there can be so much stress and anxiety around coming out, but ultimately, you have the power to choose the people you'd like to tell.

Inviting people into your safe space as a Queer person comes with SO many challenges as is, **don't make it harder on yourself by feeling like you have to do anything at all** or before you're ready.

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Especially as a person in the Indo-Caribbean community, coming out to family, friends, coworkers etc. at any age can be an extremely heavy and potentially life-altering decision. When it comes to something as important as this, you should never be made to feel less than for not coming out, nor should you ever be forced into doing something that jeopardizes your safety.

Do what feels best for you and makes sense considering your circumstances and what's important to you.

THINGS TO KEEP IN MIND

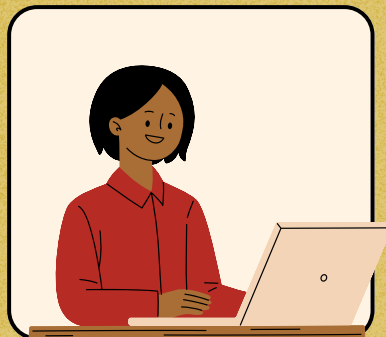
So, you've considered your options, you've decided you want to come out, and you're ready to take the leap.

Here are some things to keep in mind:



- **Coming out to yourself.** I love this idea that I got from the Human Rights Campaign Foundation in their guide on [Coming Out as Bisexual](#).
 - When it comes to understanding, defining, and sharing your own identity, ignore external pressures and stereotypes as much as possible (easier said than done, but no one gets to tell you how you identify!).
 - Remember that it's okay if you previously came out identifying with terms that have now changed. You're allowed to change after learning new information.
 - You can come out at any stage of your life and it's never too late.
 - It's totally normal to feel whatever emotions you're feeling.

- **What does safety look like?** When deciding who to come out to, it can be helpful to know what a safe person looks like. Miami-based therapist Maria G. Sosa, lists some traits of a safe person in her Instagram post as someone who...
 - Listens with empathy
 - Shows up and follows through on their word
 - Finds ways to repair when damage has been done
 - Provides a holding space for vulnerability and messy emotions
- **Coming out is a process.** The official Pride Instagram account released a post on National Coming Out Day a few years ago reminding everyone that...
 - There is no one coming out story.
 - It's okay to be scared and lean on your supports.
 - Coming out is a life-long process that gets easier with time; which brings us to my next point,
- **Give it time.** Whether you're struggling with the courage to come out to someone in particular or receiving a not-so-good reaction to your coming out, know that there is nothing wrong with you and these things take time. You/they might come around or you might not. What matters is...
 - Giving yourself space to process.
 - Taking time away from things that hurt us.
 - Moving forward on your terms; and finally,
- **Reach out for support.** The next few pages will list 2SLGBTQIA+ resources and clinics, as well as culturally-specific practitioners you can access for support.



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I want to note that all of the above mentioned are in the event that you have full control over your coming out process, that I know not all of us are privileged enough to experience.

If you have been “outed” or forced to come out before you were ready, know that you’re allowed to grieve what could have been and it’s never too late to take control of your experience and come out as you would have wanted to.

Please seek support if you’ve found yourself in this situation and are struggling. This can be extremely traumatizing to experience and each of us deserves safety, autonomy, and unconditional acceptance. Period.

WHERE TO FIND SUPPORT

(WILL BE UPDATED CONTINUOUSLY)

- [A list of Sexual Health Clinics in Toronto/the Greater Toronto Area compiled by abuseneverbecomesus](#)
- [A Directory of Indo-Caribbean Mental Health Professionals compiled by Brown Gyal Diary](#)
- [Mental Health Crisis and Support Resources Across Ontario compiled by aadhyacanada](#)
- [Indo-Caribbean Women Group Therapy as offered by breakthroughmhc starting October 13th](#)
- [The 519 organization](#)
- [Toronto Pflag organization](#)
- [themarginalizedmajority Instagram page](#)
- [LGBT Youth Line Toronto](#)
- [Resources as collected by our association \(ICCA\).](#)



Please feel free to recommend any resources you know of that could be helpful to our community!

Email: indocaribcdn@gmail.com

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A NOTE ON FINDING SUPPORT

As a studying mental health practitioner and someone who has worked in the mental health field for a number of years now, I feel it is my responsibility to recommend *safer* resources to any and all communities I serve.

With saying this, knowing I'm creating this Guide for fellow marginalized folks, it is in good conscience that I recognize the potential harm in recommending traditional methods of therapy - particularly in situations of abuse - knowing that community care, social justice, and institutional changes are usually what's most needed by members in our community.

Therapy and other reformed policing systems alike are not the only options when seeking support, although they are certainly the most pushed and funded in our capitalist society.

This disclaimer is not to discount professionals who are highly trained and specialized to help those who need it.

However, I must state that my personal politics lean towards helpers and healers outside of the police state, whom Queer people have leaned on for decades now, such as peer support spaces, knowledgeable elders, trusted organizations, and other supports of that nature.

I've tried my best to find resources that fall under all of these categories and hope you are able to find the help you're looking for.

Furthermore, if you would like support from a licensed professional, but aren't able to afford it [here are some options to consider.](#)

SO, I'VE COME OUT... NOW WHAT?



As you may or may not know by now, 'coming out' or rather **coming into yourself** is a never ending process.

However, here are some things you can do after coming out, regardless of if it's your first time or the tenth time.

- **Keep learning!**
 - From personal experience after having come out, you never stop understanding more about your identity. The Trevor Project has put together an awesome and incredibly user-friendly [resource center for further reading](#). Topics include sexual orientation, mental health, suicide, community and tons more. I highly recommend checking it out.
- **Give yourself grace.**
 - Whether your coming out experience has gone as planned or not, remember you're also in the midst of figuring this world out for yourself. For most, if not all of us, being Queer doesn't happen overnight, nor do we know it from the moment we're born. Whatever your timeline looks like and however your journey is spanning out is OK!
- **We keep us safe.**
 - Now that you're in the community, you may hear or know of other Indo-Caribbean folks who are Queer from going to events, joining associations like this one, and/or making friends. Within our culture, I know we have a tendency to gossip, but it's important to note that **gossip about Queer people jeopardizes our safety**. If you'd like to read more on this, [hellokekutho on Instagram has a great post](#).

Find community!

This is probably the best advice I can offer anyone reading this. When I set out to create this Guide, I thought about dedicating a section on ‘What To Do If Coming Out Doesn’t Go Well’, but to be honest with you, I’m not a professional on what you should do in this situation and I think regardless of your experience, we all need to hear similar advice; **protect your safety and wellbeing, give it time, find support, and of course, find community.**

Everyone’s experience with Queerness looks and feels different and that’s the beauty of being gay! There are no rules!! Welcome, you’re free now.

For me, the most ever-giving, beautiful, challenging, impactful, and life-changing thing you can do as a Queer person is to join community, be in community, and turn to and hold others in community. Let me tell you, there is truly not another community on Earth that feels as good as being surrounded and encompassed by authentic and unapologetic Queerness.

I think this has to do with the fact that we are marginalized by every culture, facet, and way of life in the modern world (besides Indigenous cultures, of course). Anything touched by colonialism, that now reeks of rules, standards, and expectations, won’t accept us in our entirety and I don’t know, some days that feels soul crushing, but most days it feels revolutionary in the best way.

As you may know, the 2SLGBTQIA+ community has come a very, very far way in the last three to four decades alone. Although, it continues to be an extremely scary time in our political culture, never before have we been able to be this Gay and this ‘out’.

Whenever you feel comfortable to, and however you do it, I pray you find the community I’ve been so fortunate and blessed to have found. And lucky for you, the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association is a perfect place to start!

EQUALITY AND PRIDE FOR INDO-CARIBBEANS (EPIC)

Equality and Pride for Indo-Caribbeans (EPIC) by the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association was established to combat homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia within the Indo-Caribbean community. Our intent was to establish a dedicated arm of the organization to serve Canada's LGBTQIA+ Indo-Caribbean community through a variety of ways.



This work continues, and on an ongoing basis we are working to achieve programs that will:

1. Educate the Indo-Caribbean community about LGBTQ+ individuals;
2. Build a network of support and resources for members of Canada's LGBTQ+ Indo-Caribbean;
3. Provide a safe space for members of Canada's LGBTQ+ Indo-Caribbean community to interact and connect

The EPIC Collective

Recently, we launched The EPIC Collective, a new space where we're hoping to come together once a month (virtually and in-person) to discuss various topics of interest and hold space for one another to connect and build community.

We encourage anyone reading this guide to reach out to connect and participate in our ongoing activities. This space is dedicated to you, and it's only successful if you get involved and 'tek up space'.

HOW TO SUPPORT SOMEONE WHO IS READY TO 'COME OUT'

A section for the loved ones of a Queer person.

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REMINDERS FOR LOVED ONES WITH REGARDS TO THE 'COMING OUT' PROCESS

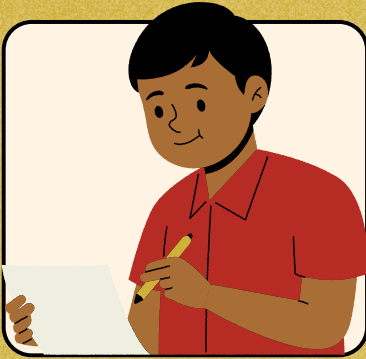
To help you become a loving support system for any Indo-Caribbean LGBTQ2S+ persons in your life who decided to come out to you, our EPIC Network has crafted this list of reminders to help you navigate through this vulnerable time in an LGBTQ2S+ person's life.

- Listen to what they share with you and reaffirm their feelings.
- Become aware of your biases and avoid navigating to religious and cultural ideologies and narratives that promote discrimination, homophobia, biphobia, or transphobia.
- These conversations can be new to many Indo-Caribbean parents and family members. Take the time to learn from the person and on your own.
- 'Coming out' can be and feel very isolating and exhausting, with many coming out more than once. Make sure they're doing okay and check in on them.
- Get to know their friends and make your home a safe space where they can gather and feel safe.
- Be an ally. Take a stand against homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic remarks and actions vocalized or displayed by family and friends.
- Use the appropriate pronouns when speaking and introducing them. Using gender-neutral pronouns can be challenging at first, and it can take time to learn what they mean and how to use them correctly. Make sure to correct yourself anytime to make a mistake. This shows you care and love them.
- Tell them you love them, and accept them for who they are.
- They will come to you when they're ready.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO LOVED ONES OF A QUEER PERSON



Parents, family, friends, this is for you, because you care...

If you're reading these next few pages, someone very close to you, who you love dearly, has probably just come out to you.

I want to preface this open letter by saying I am not a professional.

I'm not a professional on your experience, the existing dynamics of your relationship to this person, or what fears exist within you/them.

However, what I can shed some insight on is the perspective of the Queer person in your life.

I want you to imagine having to hold back a part of yourself that is so all-consuming and so integral to who you are, and which you have no way of getting rid of, from everyone you love most.

Now, I want you to imagine knowing this part of yourself to be hated by your family, culture, society, religion, and any other large institution you can think of.

Sounds pretty isolating and terrifying, huh?

All of us want to be accepted and to belong. It is a fundamental human need, desire, and birth right (to me) that we are loved for who we are.

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AN OPEN LETTER TO LOVED ONES OF A QUEER PERSON

It's true, based on the ways in which you were raised, the culture, social climate etc., you possess the right to your own opinions, preferences, and desires.

However, I want you to know that at the end of the day, your loved one isn't looking to smear your family name, end your lineage, curse your existence, ruin your life, or any other atrocity you feel is being committed by them.

The Queer person in your life is simply trying to invite you into this very important part of their lives, have you see them for who they are, and most of all, to receive your love.

Accepting this part of them is for you to come to, however you want to do that. I would say the most important thing to remember is that **your loved one is going to be who they are, regardless of whether you accept them for it or not.**

Unfortunately, there's an extremely long un-learning process for you to do here, which I know is daunting. Due to the impact colonialism has had on our culture, we tend to think we possess our loved ones. We think we own them and to an extent, we must dominate them in order to remain attached to them. But, the truth is **we do not.**

Your Queer loved one is their own, autonomous, completely separate person, and no matter what you imagined, prepared, expected, and/or anticipated their life to be, they are entitled to their own reality.

Now, I don't want this section to come off as preachy or reprimanding. If anything, my only goal is to keep your loved one in your life.

AN OPEN LETTER TO LOVED ONES OF A QUEER PERSON

I want your families to live long, I want your lineage to blossom, I want nothing more than peace, prosperity, and health for the Indo-Caribbean family.

The harsh truth is that loving your loved one for who they are, whether from far or up close, loudly or in private, you must love them in their entirety in order to keep them present, honest, and an active part in your life.

Now, you may need to grieve a lot of things in this process. You may have hundreds of sleepless nights and internal battles about your values, morals, and their safety among several other things.

I want you to know that for many Indo-Caribbean families, this is not easy. But, I'd rather this be the hardest thing you ever go through together, than to see families break apart when they don't need to.

There are many organizations which offer support groups to parents/loved ones during this process. I will link to some below, but most of all, I encourage you to continue leaning on the supports you already have.

My favourite part of our culture, that is in direct conflict with the nuclear family structure and the capitalist societies to which we've immigrated to, is that we been had community. Lots of it. Like too much at times. But even then, I would encourage you to turn to your siblings, aunts, cousins, religious leaders, family friends, and everyone in your existing networks to help you process this change, rather than outsourcing.

It isn't shameful to know a Queer person and you aren't doing anything wrong by speaking to your experience.

AN OPEN LETTER TO LOVED ONES OF A QUEER PERSON

I say this because you never know, maybe your sisters kid is also a little Queer and by speaking with her, her kid may have an easier time coming out, and you'll both be better prepared, or other family members will feel less shame in about talking about Queerness or knowing someone Queer.

The antithesis to stigma and shame is talking about it, which lucky for us, Indo-Caribbean folks were born to do!

However, for some reason, and I see this in my own family, when issues arise or “taboo” things happen within our immediate community, we tend to keep quiet. We hide. We spread rumours. We do everything except talk about it in the open. **And this has to change if we want to keep our families together.**

If you grew up in a family like mine, there is Queerness everywhere. Whether you have an aunt who lives with her partner, but doesn't identify her as her wife or you have an uncle, with an eclectic taste for fashion, who never married - we've been here for centuries. I know you know.

Anyway, I'm not educated enough to speak on the history of Queerness in the Indo-Caribbean, but I will hope that we create sections for it in this Guide in the future and others in my organization are able to shed some light on it (maybe even you!)

If you've read this letter, I assume you are an open person, wanting to learn and grow in this area, and I thank you for your commitment to ending generational traumas, keeping the Indo-Caribbean family together, and for loving your Queer person. Thank you for loving us.

[Toronto Area Support Groups for Parents](#)

INDO-CARIBBEAN RESOURCES

Here are some resources my team and I wanted to highlight, but we couldn't necessarily work it into the Guide:

- [Tek Up Space: A Panel on Being Queer and Indo-Caribbean from ASAAP Toronto](#)
- [Words of love and affirmation to the Queer Indo-Caribbean Community from The Brown Gyal Diary](#)
- [Being LGBTQ2S+ Indo-Caribbean Fiyahside Chat from the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association](#)
- [Transgender Day of Visibility Fiyahside Chat from the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association](#)
- [Gender Pronoun Explanation from the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association](#)
- [Jowelle De Souza from Trinidad and Tobago on Coming Out as Transgender](#)
- [Coming Out Resources from the Human Rights Campaign](#)



A THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to read through this Guide.

My hope is that it helps even just one person or someone's 'coming out' is much easier because of it.

If you know someone who may benefit from the contents of this Guide, please share it.

The goal is that it may positively impact the lives of those questioning their identity or need support on their journey of sharing their identity with others.

I would be happy to connect with any members in the community concerning this resource, as would ICCA and the rest of the EPIC team.



CREATED IN 2023

Written and organized by Adaleide Kissoon for EPIC, Equality and Pride for Indo-Caribbeans by the Indo-Caribbean Canadian Association.

SOURCES CONSULTED

- Trevor Project - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Coming-Out-Handbook.pdf>
- Pflag Toronto Resources - <https://www.torontopflag.org/resources>
- marigoldseedscollective Instagram post - https://www.instagram.com/p/CEfKuoAju0A/?img_index=1
- Human Rights Campaign Foundation Guide to Coming Out as Bisexual - <https://caps.ucsc.edu/resources/coming-out-guide-bisexual.pdf>
- Traits of a Safe Person Instagram post - <https://www.instagram.com/p/B-h5ixKjQsS/>
- Pride Instagram post for National Coming Out Day - https://www.instagram.com/p/CGNMNs3Hpub/?img_index=5
- Sexual Health Clinics list - https://www.instagram.com/p/CCAHTN3h6Jg/?img_index=6
- Brown Gyal Diary Mental Health Directory - <https://www.browngirlidiary.com/indo-caribbean-mental-health-professionals-directory>
- Mental Health Crisis Support list - https://www.instagram.com/p/CB_LPuihUZf/?img_index=1
- Indo-Caribbean Women Group Therapy - <https://www.instagram.com/p/CxfyGa-ukuO/>
- The 519 - <https://www.the519.org/>
- themarginalizedmajority - <https://www.instagram.com/themarginalizedmajority/?hl=en>
- LGBT Youth Line Toronto - <https://www.youthline.ca/get-support/ways-we-support/>
- EPIC Resource Page - <https://www.indocaribcdn.com/epic>
- Options for When You Can't Afford Therapy - https://www.instagram.com/p/CGXmacHD5ge/?img_index=1
- The Trevor Project Resource Center - <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>
- Gossip Jeopardizes Queer Safety - https://www.instagram.com/p/CB-6xXIKzkZ/?img_index=8

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