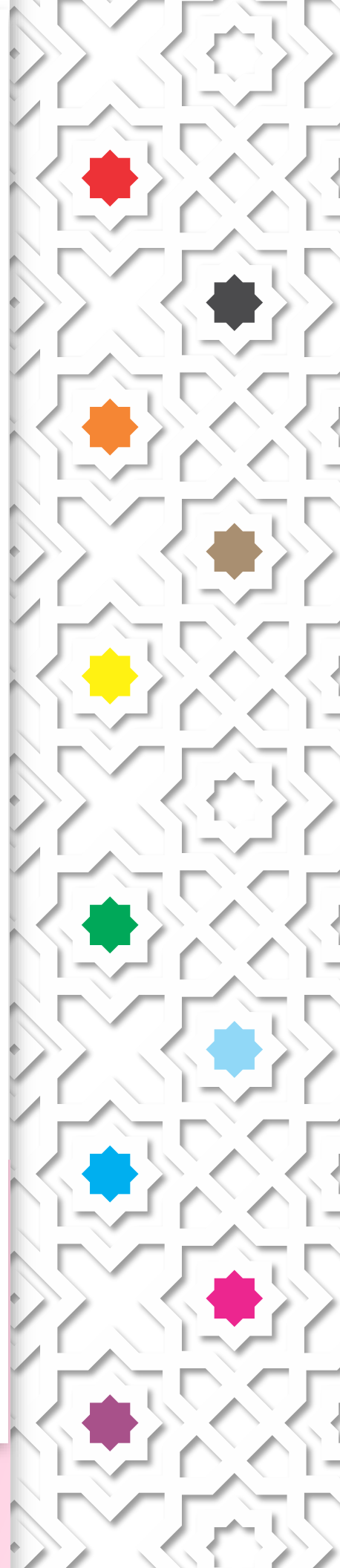


Crescent Moon: Supporting Family Members of LGBTQ+ Muslims

A Facilitator's Guide

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Background

LGBTQ+ Muslims have been offering intra-community support programs and have engaged in visible activism in Canada since the early 1990s. Much of this was done through an organization called Salaam Canada, though not exclusively. The support programming in Toronto in particular had a strong uptake serving many LGBTQ+ Muslims who attended for coming out and social support as well as newly arrived LGBTQ+ Muslims (many of whom were refugee claimants) who relied on Salaam Canada for more practical support through the immigration and settlement process. Most of the Toronto-based programming was run out of The 519 Church Street Community Centre. Programming has typically been intended for LGBTQ+ Muslims themselves. There has often been conversation around providing support to parents and family members of LGBTQ+ Muslims though creating such a space has been a challenge for a number of reasons, including the following:

- a) Uncertainty around how to ground such a support space in an Islamic framework or a shared Muslim experience.

For example, will participants want to discuss theology or culture? How will the question of authority be addressed when Islam is culturally diverse with multiple sectarian divisions? If participants are starting off with a range of expressions of the Islamic faith, what additional work will bringing them together entail? In a support group for LGBTQ+ Muslims, the fabric of the space is quilted by lived experiences of reconciled, fragmented, compartmentalized and reimagined identities. That level of creativity is less readily available in a support space for parents and family members.



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- b) Difficulty finding appropriate facilitators who can honour the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ Muslims while also managing the complexity of family members who have unique needs with regard to their grieving process, misplaced objectives to “change” their loved one, or desires for their loved one to pursue a “marriage of convenience.”

Offering facilitation services, especially in a voluntary capacity, doesn't feel emotionally safe for LGBTQ+ Muslims who do not have additional supports for facilitation skills training, curriculum content development, debriefing opportunities, and managing the emotional impact of working in a community you belong to.

- c) Apprehension from LGBTQ+ Muslims about whether or not their family members would attend such a group if it were created and uncertainty about what the strategies for outreach and recruitment might include.

Some people have suggested that people in their family would appreciate connecting with others but would be anxious about meeting people they know from their local masjid. This is the same double-edged sword that many folks experience in their coming out journeys. They'll often say "I want to meet people who understand my culture, but I do not want to be outed to people in my specific community."

Before the lockdowns of the COVID-19 pandemic, there had been ongoing conversations between Salaam Canada, the Children's Aide Society of Toronto, and the Ottawa-Carlton District School Board about the emerging need for a support group specifically for parents of LGBTQ+ Muslim youth. A collaboration proposal was brought forward but the terms could not be agreed upon at the time.

Shortly thereafter, Dr. Momin Rahman and Dr. Maryam Khan reached out to Salaam Canada to see if, instead of offering a group right away, a stage-wise project could first begin with development of a curriculum and facilitator's manual. By July 2022, Salaam Canada shut down its operations as a national organization but one of the Core Team Leads, Rahim Thawer, continued to work with Dr. Rahman and Dr. Khan to produce this curriculum.

Intended Group Participants

When family groups are conceptualized, we most commonly expect that we are talking about mending a tension between straight parents and LGBTQ+ youth. However, this group is designed for all family members of LGBTQ+ Muslims. That includes parents, additional caregivers, siblings, spouses and children. The broad participant net is an intentional reminder that queerness and transness are not products of a newer or “more Western” generation; rather, people “come out” at all ages and they are sometimes in heterosexual marriages and/or have children before they are able to express their gender and sexuality.

It is of paramount importance that the approach in facilitation honors critical intersectional perspectives, anti-colonial and post-colonial perspectives on sexuality and gender, and a pluralist and Liberatory perspective on Islam and being Muslim.





Group Objectives

This group will not be able to resolve the specific, complex challenges of Muslim families that choose to attend. Nor can we expect participants to achieve full acceptance of their LGBTQ+ family members. Rather, this group can provide a structured support space and opportunities for learning toward increased harmony in their families.

RFUCM aims to support family members of LGBTQ+ individuals by providing a structured support space in order to:

- a) Discuss experiences of being on the receiving end of a coming out story;
- b) Examine concerns and fears about what it means to love and support an LGBTQ+ family member;
- c) Increase knowledge about the existence of LGBTQ+ people in Islam and in Muslim-majority countries;
- d) Share in confidence positive and challenging conversations that are ongoing within the family;
- e) Consider ways that the relationships between all family members can be strengthened (and perhaps repaired) through learning, communication, and acts of kindness and solidarity.

Facilitator Considerations

It is recommended that each session is facilitated by two co-facilitators, that one facilitator identify as LGBTQ+ Muslim, racialized LGBTQ+, or LGBTQ+ individuals who have lived experiences and knowledges about Islam, and sexual and gender diversity. Co-facilitation allows for multiple perspectives and increases opportunities for the participants to connect with the program material and feel comfortable sharing. In addition, if a participant feels activated by the material being covered and needs a break, it's helpful to have one facilitator who can continue to run the group while another supports the participant who might appreciate some one-on-one attention.

If you let participants know at the outset what the range of planned topics include, they will be less likely to feel an urgency to cover the many relevant subtopics in one setting. However, in times when participants go "off topic" it may be important to prioritize the natural flow of the discussion, particularly if the person sharing usually holds back in discussions. For additional questions and unique subtopics that arise, it's recommended that a chart paper is available as a "parking lot" that can be returned to in a future session.

Storytelling is an invaluable tool to foster a sense of belonging and connection. In fact, allowing people to share experiences in depth is what distinguishes a support space like RFUCM from an interpersonal or skills-based therapeutic group. Therefore, it is important that participants are encouraged to speak from their own experiences, avoid giving advice to others, and are encouraged to be mindful of sharing the talking space.





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Group Evaluation Support

If you decide to offer this group through your organization and would like support with monitoring and evaluation, please contact:

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SESSION 1: Common Questions Family Members Ask When Someone Comes Out

Introductions

Review confidentiality guidelines. Share your names and what brought you to this group (2-3min each)

Check-In

Think back to when you learned that your LGBTQ+ family member shared their identity with you. Tell us what the first question was that came to your mind.

Exercise

Review each of the common questions listed below and the identity terms used in LGBTQ+ communities. Ask participants to raise their hand for each question that they've asked themselves or struggled to answer themselves.

1. What causes someone to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or trans; is it biology or their environment (i.e. nature or nurture)?
2. Can someone try (or pray) to be straight or cisgender? Can therapy help change someone?
3. Did this happen because we failed as parents? Are we being punished for shortcomings/sins?
4. Why would someone change who they are if they were born a man/woman?
5. We accept our loved one but why do they need to tell everyone?
6. This is a Western thing. Why did we not know any LGBTQ+ people back home?
7. What do Islam and the Qur'an say about being LGBTQ+?

Once participants have had a chance to respond passively by a show of hands, ask participants to now share if they've found good answers to any of the questions since they first considered them. Call on participants who are comfortable offering their more-informed ideas.

The facilitator can then draw on the points below to respond to the first 3 questions. Note that this portion of the exercise is more of a presentation and participants will be asked to share reflections at the end.





Nature vs. Nurture

It's not uncommon for people to have a range of assumptions about the LGBTQ+ community. For instance, you might assume that people *become* gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender as a result of some kind of adverse life experience. If that's your starting place, you will then try to create a story that helps explain why your loved one is LGBTQ+. For example, you might think:

- They've been a victim of Western culture and influences
- They've been brainwashed by their peers and they are *making a choice*
- They have been coerced in some way or targeted with evil eye/jinn
- They've experienced some kind of sexual abuse which has led to confusion about their gender or sexuality
- They had an absent parent or not enough role modelling from a particular gender
- They have not tried hard enough to be straight or cisgender

Responses:

- It's unhelpful to suggest that someone has chosen to be LGBTQ+. While many LGBTQ+ people will have joyful and fulfilling lives, when they first begin to explore their identities, it's usually quite scary and isolating. LGBTQ+ people often know they are different from a young age and have spent a lot of time trying to make sense of who they are in the world. In addition, LGBTQ+ people who do not fit into neat gender boxes are also the targets of bullying. Therefore, it's offensive (and not sensible) to think that someone has chosen to be marginalized or chosen a path that could lead to potential rejection and abandonment from their family members.
- You might still wonder if social context can influence a person's sexuality or gender. The answer is yes. But, what is being influenced is their experience of opportunities to safely express who they are. Social context cannot "turn" someone queer or trans. That means there were likely lots of LGBTQ+ people in your life as a child and adult but you may not have known because the social context didn't make it safe enough for them to express it.
- People sometimes get curious about the biological origins of being LGBTQ+. They'll consider the possibilities of hormone imbalance and genetic testing. It's important to be critical when engaging with these theories. The entire framing of this "scientific question" has a baseline assumption that being heterosexual and cisgender are normal and all other expressions of gender and sexuality are deviant. In truth, being heterosexual and cisgender is not *more* normal than being LGBTQ+; they are simply more common and more visible. Further, we don't need to understand the biology of LGBTQ+ orientations any more than we need to study the biology of heterosexuality; these are simply social and biological occurrences in the population.

Trying to Change

- Most LGBTQ+ people have gone through an initial period of curiosity, conflict and inquiry before being ready to share their identity with others more openly. During this period, they will have already considered trying to fit into the larger majority and concluded that this is not possible for them.



- Trying to change a person's sexual orientation or gender identity is extremely harmful. All major psychological associations internationally have denounced the practice of reparative therapy. It's widely recognized that such change efforts have detrimental consequences for a person's mental health.
- In Muslim communities, people will sometimes frame "tendencies" and "urges" toward same-gender attraction as a test from Allah. This is not helpful to the LGBTQ+ person because you are telling them that they are failing their own Creator. Instead, we should reframe this concept to suggest that Allah is testing the strength of a family to unconditionally love and accept their LGBTQ+ loved one.
- In Muslim communities, people will sometimes consider (or threaten) sending their loved one back home. There's an assumption here that the cause of your loved one's identity is the influence of Western culture and that exposure to another culture will "cure" them. This assumption is entirely faulty: there are LGBTQ+ people everywhere.

Parenting and Punishment

- Parenting style has no bearing on someone's sexual orientation or gender identity. However, a supportive environment for self-expression will help a child develop a healthy self-esteem and the confidence needed to face challenges in the world.
- The conversation on "bad parenting" can be frustrating because it takes away from the story about the LGBTQ+ person's experience and shifts the focus on the grieving parents.
- When people frame having an LGBTQ+ family member as a punishment from God, we must stop to think about how that makes our loved one feel.
- For those who believe in the concept of punishment from God for something (e.g. lying, cheating, lack of piety, not paying zakat, or not fasting), it's more helpful to think about the consequence in your own life instead of through a family member. Your family members don't exist simply as rewards or punishments for your life choices—they are their own person with their own complexities.

Discussion Questions

- In what ways has the presentation of the first 3 common questions been helpful for you?
- Are there anecdotes from your personal experiences that shed light on your learning process?
- Are there general reflections you want to share?

Check Out

What is something you're already thinking about differently after today's session?

What new piece of information do you suspect will take some time for you to feel comfortable with related to the topic?





SESSION 2: Common Questions, Part 2

Check-In

Share your names again. Let us know how the last session stirred up thoughts, questions or conversations in your family.

Exercise

Continued from previous week.

Transgender and gender non-conformity


Firstly, we must reflect on how each of us was taught about being a man or a woman in our specific families and communities. When was it *not* helpful to be given gender-specific rules? For example, social rules that determine whether or not you can show emotion or rules that suggest what your role in a marriage or partnership should be. Strict ideas about how to be a man or how to be a woman are limiting for many people and need to be deconstructed. Even if you didn't find gender-specific roles to be limiting, we must recognize that they don't work for some people and imposing limits can be outright harmful.

Across the globe and across cultures, there are people who understand themselves beyond the simplicity of a two-gender model. They are not ill; rather, they are enlightened. They may be of both masculine and feminine expressions; they may be part of a third gender; they may desire to move around in the world in a gender different than what they were assigned at birth. These human experiences of transcendence challenge those of us who have never questioned our own gender identity. People who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth (like most of us in this room), are not "more normal" but rather, we are simply more common.

This interactive map shows the number of cultures where more than two genders are found: https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/

Some transgender people will want to pursue medical transition procedures while others will not. The common conservative argument used against T/GNC people is that "God has created everything as it is" and "God does not make mistakes." However, the world we live in is more complex than this. And, Muslims everywhere avail themselves of medical procedures in order to better their health and prolong their lives. This is also true for trans and gender non-conforming people. In fact, surgical transition procedures are almost always deemed medically necessary for the well-being of transgender people. Further, many Islamic scholars argue that the Quranic verses pertaining to "changing the creation of Allah" or "wrongly interfering in God's creation" do not refer to the body or to gender-affirming surgery, but refer to "changing religion, namely Islam, and God's commands."





Islam has always taken sides with the oppressed rather than with the oppressor since the day of its establishment, and this MUST include taking a stand against transphobia. In order to understand the trans experience, **we must listen to the voices of trans Muslims**. Here are some resources that can allow us to gain a better understanding:

Gender Spectrum. (2018). "Being Transgender and Muslim" with Mahdia Lynn, founder of Masjid al-Rabia Mosque [YouTube Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-J4zr8646uk>

Jagiella, L. (2021). Among the eunuchs: A Muslim transgender journey [Memoir]. Hurst & Company.

Life, V. (2022). The School Helping Trans Muslims in Indonesia | Transnational [YouTube Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QbNl6OgjYyA>

TEDx Talks. (2021). A Divine Departure: A Journey of A Moslem Transman | Amar Alfikar | TEDxJakartaWomen [YouTube Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XyNIDQtXnN8>

TEDx Talks. (2015). Brown, trans, queer, Muslim and proud | Sabah Choudrey | TEDxBrixton [YouTube Video]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w6hxrZW6I9I>

*Zaharin, A. A. M., & Pallotta-Chiarolli, M. (2020). Countering Islamic conservatism on being transgender: Clarifying Tantawi's and Khomeini's fatwas from the progressive Muslim standpoint. *International Journal of Transgender Health*, 21(3), 235–241. Full article: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC8726683/>*

Broadcasting vs. compartmentalizing

- Having other people in your cultural and religious community know that someone in your family openly identifies as LGBTQ+ can be stressful. You might be concerned about how they will treat you and your loved ones. You may have a strong desire to control who knows what information about your family. Unfortunately, this will likely cause tension and conflict in your family.
- LGBTQ+ people usually experience deep shame earlier in their journeys for being different and for feeling like they've let their families down. By the time they have "come out" to you, they've overcome a significant amount of shame and it feels appropriate to want to celebrate that by specifically not hiding who they are.
- Events like Pride can seem like an unnecessary broadcasting of one's personal life.





However, these events are actually unique opportunities for LGBTQ+ people to be around others like them and feel good about themselves. Straight and cisgender people get to experience being in their own communities almost daily and so they might have a harder time appreciating the need for events that celebrate minority identities.

- Remember that heterosexuality is on display and celebrated everywhere: affection shown by couples, the emphasis and money spent on weddings, the welcoming of new children to the family; being LGBTQ+ can mean re-imagining what our lives will look like.
- Finally, sharing who we are openly is important for other LGBTQ+ people. When they see visible LGBTQ+ people, it makes them feel good about themselves and reduces their isolation.
- Many LGBTQ+ Muslims emphasize that they are both LGBTQ+ and Muslim. This is sometimes met with resistance from dominant Muslim communities. It's important to recognize that all Muslims have a right to practice Islam in a way that upholds their own dignity.


Western influence

- Who in this group knew of LGBTQ+ people growing up? How were they talked about? How did you understand them? And, what do you know about LGBTQ+ people today in your country of origin?
- It's important to recognize that even if your own experience in your country of origin didn't include LGBTQ+ people, that doesn't mean they didn't exist. Rather, it means that visibility was low due to a lack of safety. Or, it means that you didn't have opportunities to meet people that were unlike yourself.
- Here is a list of [LGBTQ+ organizations](#) across the world, including in Muslim majority countries.
- If your country of origin still isn't a safe place for LGBTQ+ people today, it is very possible that your loved one may not have "come out" if you were living there now. However, that doesn't mean they would not have been who they are, rather it would have been harder to be who they are.

Religion

- Many LGBTQ+ Muslims and their families turn to theological texts and teachings to examine where their experiences and identities are celebrated.
- Often, the Story of Prophet Lut is used as religious justification to condemn LGBTQ+ Muslims. Thankfully, lots of prominent Muslim theologians and Imams have disproved the Story of Lut being about homosexuality.



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- A closer reading of the verses reveals that the Story of Prophet Lut is about a community of people being inhospitable and participating in the sexual abuse and rape of strangers.
 - LGBTQ+ Muslims, like everyone else, seek intimacy and consensual, loving relationships. They should be able to do so without their deen questioned, and offered the love and support of their family and friends.

Discussion Questions

- How did the responses presented sit with you? What did you appreciate? How did they get you thinking differently?
- Are there anecdotes from your personal experiences that shed light on your learning process?
- Are there general reflections you want to share?

Check Out

If you were asked any of the seven common questions presented in sessions one and two, on a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your own comfort in being able to respond?

1 = not confident at all 10 = very confident





SESSION 2: Grief, Loss & Fear

Check In

Share a dream or vision you've always had of your loved one. This is a snapshot from your perspective; it can be in the context of love, work, community, family, caregiving, fame, etc.

Exercise

Select one of the following videos to show to participants:

1. Khalid el Khatib's father is a Palestinian refugee who risked everything to come to America and start a family. Not wanting to disappoint him, Khalid stayed in the closet at the advice of a therapist, until the closet came too much to bear.
<https://youtu.be/H6jvoU0zFis>
2. "A year ago I [Aadil] did something I never imagined myself doing- I wrote and read out a coming out letter to my family and recorded their reactions! I'm now ready to share my story. I show clips of me coming out to my mum, siblings and dad and talk about what happened after." https://youtu.be/Bj1xfq_ti2U

→ Discussion Questions

- Were there any similarities between the coming out experiences in the videos and the ones you experienced with your loved ones?
- What do you wish went differently, if anything, about the moment you learned that your loved one was queer or trans?
- Did the coming out experience activate a sense of sadness for you? If so, why do you think that is?

Psychoeducation

Define loss and grief and connect them to being on the receiving end of the coming out experience.

The experience of **loss** is often connected to the emotional sadness, emptiness and pain that follows the death of a loved one. However, we also experience loss in other domains of our lives. For example, changing jobs (or being laid off), transitioning to retirement, leaving your country of origin, a child moving out of the family home, and adjusting to your own physical limitations due to a chronic health condition.

→ If your loved one has come out to you as gay, bisexual, lesbian or trans, you may also experience loss. While you haven't actually lost the person physically, you may feel loss around how well you thought you knew your loved one; loss around an image you had of your loved one in your mind.





Grief is a longer-term emotional response to loss and can encompass many other feelings such as, sadness, fear, regret, worry, despair, longing, betrayal, anger, and anxiety; it can also include gratitude, optimism, hopefulness, peace and acceptance. Grief is complex and not time limited; grief can be unexpectedly activated in social settings or particular times of the year.

→ Examples of when grief—the longer-term response to loss—can get activated for you when you know your loved one is gay, bisexual, lesbian or trans:

- Thinking about your loved one’s future falling outside the realm of “normal” (e.g. getting married, having children, attending prayers, being mistreated by others)
- Processing what it means to not know your loved one as well as you once thought; feeling disconnected from your loved one
- Anxiety that you might have done something to *make them this way* (which is irrational but also legitimately stressful); or anxiety that you’ve been acting in ways that has made their journey more challenging
- Sitting with a sense of helplessness when you hear about LGBT discrimination and violence
- Worry that they will be judged or rejected by your local Muslim community or family in other parts of the world
- Realizing that you used to hold anti-LGBT views that you vocalized to some of your closest friends whom you no longer feel comfortable receiving support from
- Wanting to hold on to memories and artefacts that remind you of how your loved one used to look/dress/appear prior to their social or medical transition

→ Discussion Questions

- How have you experienced grief and loss connected to your loved one’s coming out experience?
- Tell us about a time/moment when your own grief got in the way of being genuinely supportive of your loved one.
- How can we communicate our grief? And, to whom? For example, saying to a child “I’m grieving who you used to be” can be experienced as harsh and can even incite guilt.

Check-Out

We’ve all experienced death and non-death related losses in our lives. Name one behaviour/activity/self-talk you’ve engaged in to help ease your sense of grief in the past (in any context).





SESSION 3: The Community

Check In

What communities are you part of?
(e.g. religious, spiritual, recreational, occupational, international, parental, medical, etc.)

Exercise

Raise your hand only if you agree with the statement read out loud. If you disagree with the statement or it doesn't speak to your experience, leave your hand down.

Try to do this exercise without any discussion between statements. Silently observe one another and notice your own feelings in this process. You will not be judged for your response; on the contrary, this exercise is intended to reduce isolation and generate reflective discussions.

- a) When I learned that my loved one was LGBTQ+, I worried about what my peers, extended family, and community would think.
- b) When I learned that my loved one was LGBTQ+, I feared that people would understand this as a result of my parenting.
- c) When I learned that my loved one was LGBTQ+, I feared that people would understand this as a lack of piety (or poor adherence to religious teachings).
- d) When I learned that my loved one was LGBTQ+, I worried that I would be ostracized from my peers and community.
- e) My cultural and religious communities are more open-minded than I am.
- f) My cultural and religious communities are less open-minded than I am.
- g) People will lose respect for me if they know my loved one is openly part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- h) If someone from my cultural or religious community wanted to ask me questions about my LGBTQ+ loved one, I would feel hesitant to share.
- i) If someone from my cultural or religious community wanted to ask me questions about my LGBTQ+ loved one I would assume their intentions are good and would welcome the invitation to share.
- j) I feel ashamed about other people knowing my loved one is part of the LGBTQ+ community.
- k) I have tried to discourage my loved one from sharing their LGBTQ+ identity with other people.
- l) I have experienced family conflict over the conversations about being "too visible" as an LGBTQ+ person.





- m) If someone in my cultural or religious community said something negative about my loved one—that they will be punished by Allah or that they cannot be truly Muslim—I would want to defend my loved one.
- n) Getting educated on the experiences of LGBTQ+ Muslims feels daunting and scary.

The last three statements:

- o) I would not hesitate to tell someone I'm Muslim. It's something to be proud of.
- p) I would not hesitate to tell someone about educational or career-related achievements. It's something to be proud of.
- q) I would not hesitate to tell someone I'm a supporter of the LGBTQ+ community. It's something to be proud of.

→ Discussion Questions / Reflections

- Reflecting on our responses about things we would not hesitate to share, why is it (or has it) been difficult to understand the concept of being proud when it comes to LGBTQ+ identities?
- *Part b: Which other statements and group responses really stood out to you and why?*
- What are your fears about other people knowing that you have an LGBTQ+ family member?
- In what ways has your relationship with your peers and communities changed after your loved one told you about their LGBTQ+ identity?
- Have you experienced stigma, judgement or inappropriate questions from others about your LGBTQ+ loved one? If so, how did you manage it?
- How visible and vocal does your loved one tend to be around their LGBTQ+ identity? And, does this place expectations on you to be forthcoming, visible, vocal, or more knowledgeable?

Check Out

Briefly share how this group has been helpful to you so far. If it's brought up more difficult feelings than you previously had, it's okay to share that as well.





SESSION 4: My Islam

Check-in

Name a practice or ritual that has changed or evolved over time.

This can be something people now do or don't do at mosque; a shift in your own beliefs as a Muslim; or generational-geographic differences in how Islam is practiced in your lifetime.

Exercise

On the following page, you will find a list of traditions that originate in Muslim-majority countries. Indicate whether or not you've heard of this tradition and whether or not you personally practice it.

Reflection Questions

- Can you share a time when you felt like your Muslim-ness had been questioned or misunderstood by other Muslims due to cultural differences?
- Are there examples of times in your life when you expanded your understanding of what Islam means after meeting Muslims who practice differently than yourself?

Exercise

Our communities aren't always inclusive though we often try to be. Sometimes we're okay with divisions in our community and other times it's painful to see exclusion occurring in harmful ways.

Let's talk about divisions. We invite at least one person to share a personal experience related to that theme in their own family or community from the list below.

1. There's some tension between two Muslims in a social context due to their sect: Shia versus Sunni. Or, you're in a space where one denomination is spoken of in a negative way.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened?
Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*
2. There's a difference in opinion around wearing hijab within a family.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened?
Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*
3. Someone tells you they are choosing not to fast during Ramadan because they have a history of eating disorders and this month is actually very hard for them.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened?
Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*
4. A Muslim woman is discouraged from getting a divorce even though her husband is violent.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened?
Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*





Religious & Cultural Traditions in Muslim Communities

I've heard of this Y/N I practice this Y/N

Nowruz / Navroz – The Persian New Year which has its roots in Zoroastrianism. It's a secular tradition for many Iranians but is understood as a religious celebration for some.

Qasida – An Ode, or devotional poetry, with Arab and Persian roots. Qasidas have some similarity to Ghazals but are distinct in length and patterns. Also understood more broadly as Islamic music in some cultures. Qasidas are found in Bengal, Indonesia, Senegal, Pakistan, Central Asia and Somalia.

Boeka – This is the Malay term used in South Africa during Ramadan when Muslims break their fast just after sunset. The more common term used is Iftaar.

Parent recites Azaan and Iqamah in a newborn's ear – This is a tradition in many Muslim cultures. The logic is that the baby hears the azaan and iqama as the first sound. The child's whole life is then a prayer (salaah) which ends when they die. Some do this, some do not. Many people disagree on whether it is a religious obligation or merely a tradition.

Birthdays – Many Muslims celebrate birthdays, many do not. Those who do not celebrate usually cite that The Prophet did not celebrate and therefore we shouldn't; others suggest that blowing out candles on a cake has Pagan roots that suggest human strength over the natural world.

Walima – The Walima is a feast and marriage banquet that follows the nikah marriage ceremony.

Aqiqah – An Aqiqah usually takes place on the seventh day after a baby's birth, but is sometimes performed later on. An Aqiqah ceremony is a celebration where the meat from the sacrificed animal is cooked and shared with family, friends and members of the community who are in need.

Bai'at / Bay'ah – Bai'at or Bay'ah is an Islamic practice of declaring on oath, one's allegiance to a particular leader. This is done for a newborn or for someone converting to Islam. The Bay'ah comprises the shahadah, prayers for strength and commitment to remain as a steadfast adherent to the faith. This practice exists in Ahmadiyya tradition, Shia Nizari Ismaili tradition and many Sufi tariqahs.

Qu'ran Khatam – Recitation of Quranic verses in honour of a deceased person, particularly at the end of a 40-day mourning period.

Nikah Mut'ah / Signeh – Fixed-term marriages (temporary) common in Iraq and Iran.


Non-segregated prayer by gender – In Alevism, a branch of Shia Islam prominent in Turkey, Syria, Iran, and the Balkans. A subset of Islam, Alevi beliefs are distinct from both Sunni and mainstream Shia Islam. Alevi men and women typically pray in the same space within the cemevi ("a place of gathering/worship").

Side note: Until 2011, prayers around the Kaba in Mecca were not segregated. Segregation in the harem is a recent innovation.

Ashura rituals – Observed by Shia Muslims, these mark the death of Hussein ibn Ali and include public expressions of mourning. Rituals include group processions, shrine pilgrimages and weeping. They can also include flagellation and chest-beating.

Side note: Until the early 2000s, Muslims other than Shias (e.g. Sunnis in Pakistan) also partook in Ashura mourning rituals.



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5. A disagreement about what constitutes zakat-dasond-almgiving. For example, paying Zakat through an Islamic Relief organization versus donating money to an LGBTQ+ organization.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened? Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*

 6. Witnessing, experiencing, or participating in anti-Black racism¹.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened? Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*

 7. A transgender person attended prayers at your mosque and was told they could not sit on the side they chose.
 - *When have you experienced this? What happened? Who was excluded and how did you feel about it?*

Takeaway messages for this session

- a) diversity within the Muslim community means practices can vary and still be legitimate; this includes LGBTQ+ affirming interpretations of the faith
- b) beliefs, theological interpretations, and practices evolve in response to a changing world and this is important for us to consider with regard to inclusion of LGBTQ+ Muslims in our faith communities
- c) when we take a closer look at the histories of many Muslim majority societies, we see evidence of gender equality and acceptance of sexual diversity that has been erased over time
- d) as family members of LGBTQ+ Muslims we have a unique opportunity to be advocates and to center social justice in our understanding of Islam

Check Out

Would you want to be part of creating a more inclusive Islam? *Answer options:*

- Yes, I want to create that intention right away.
- I'm not sure.
- No, I don't think I'm ready to think in those terms.
- Other responses.

¹ Anti-Black racism is prejudice, attitudes, beliefs, stereotyping and discrimination that is directed at people of African descent and is rooted in their unique history and experience of enslavement and its legacy. Anti-Black racism is deeply entrenched in non-Black Muslim communities (e.g. South Asian, Middle Eastern) and in Canadian institutions, policies and practices, to the extent that anti-Black racism is either normalized or rendered invisible to the larger society.





SESSION 5: The Acceptance Spectrum

Check-In

How do you show your LGBTQ+ family member that you accept them?

Exercise

In pairs, you will each read the 5 scenarios. Your task will be to discuss how accepting the family members are in the scenario and then place them on this spectrum:



Case 1

Muhammad and Fatima are originally from Somalia. They have 4 children aged 8, 11, 16 and 18. All four were born in Toronto and went to good schools. All four were actively engaged in school clubs and programs; and they all attended religious study group on Saturdays. Their 16-year-old Naseem has been visibly on a unique journey compared to her siblings. She recently got a short haircut, changed some of her wardrobe, made a couple of new friends, and talks more about politics at the dinner table.

Fatima says to her husband after dinner one evening, "I think something is going on with Naseem. She seems really different in some ways. Do you think she's gay?" Muhammad replied, "That same thought crossed my mind. But let's not put any ideas into her head. Hopefully she'll stay on the right path." Fatima adds, "You're right. And anyway, I don't think she would do that to us."

Case 2

Nazanin and Aishah have been in a relationship for 10 years and married for 4. They had a small ceremony for their wedding in Vancouver which was mostly close friends and Aishah's immediate family. Most of Nazanin's family lives in Iran. Nazanin's parents live in Ottawa and they were in attendance at the wedding. However, her dad didn't want to attend initially. Nazanin and Aishah have both struggled for family acceptance but they do feel blessed to have some support from their siblings and cousins.

They've recently decided to pursue having a child and they flew to Ottawa to let their families know in person. When they arrive at Nazanin's parent's home, there's another family friend there. Nazanin's dad introduces Aishah as his daughter's friend and roommate. The lesbian couple is infuriated.





Case 3

Kareem is in his 30s, struggles with employment and lives with his parents in Kitchener-Waterloo. His younger sister Mirna is 26 and lives independently. She works in finance and has been dating her boyfriend since her undergraduate degree. Her parents are really proud of her. Kareem knows that Mirna is the apple of his parent's eyes and that they are a bit disappointed in him. Nevertheless, he's braver than anyone in the family could imagine. He's been questioning his sexuality for some time and when his parents have asked when he's going to bring someone home, he's so far said, "I'm not interested in marriage."

Kareem's mother joined him on the couch one day while he was watching a Netflix show that was clearly about a gay couple. The mother turns to Kareem and says, "You know, your father and I left everything back in Afghanistan. We came here to give you and your sister a better life. Kareem, the best gift you can give me is grandchildren." She had tears in her eyes and Kareem's heart melted. He felt angry and guilty at once. It was that moment that he decided he'd have to live a double life and never let his family really know who he was.

Case 4

Zain was assigned female at birth and transitioned socially (name, pronouns, clothing) when he was 15 and then medically between ages 17 and 20. He was on testosterone for two full years before he made it on a waitlist for top surgery. Hormone treatment therapy affected Zain's mood quite a bit in the beginning stages and physical changes were exciting but often left him wanting more. For example, he wished that his voice could deepen quicker but what he got first was facial hair. Zain is Palestinian-Canadian and his parents were both healthcare practitioners back home. Zain told them he was a boy by the time he was 8 and they responded with, "Okay, what should we call you then?" Mom asked, "How long have you been thinking about your gender?" And Dad concluded with, "I'm glad you told us. We'll love you no matter what." Both parents were a bit anxious about their child and how he'd fit into the world; whether or not he'd get bullied at school. When they went shopping, they consistently shopped in the boy's section. Everyone in the house got used to that fairly quickly.

At 17, when Zain said he was going to ask the campus physician about a referral to an endocrinologist the parents were supportive but highly anxious. Their biggest fear was that hormones and medical transition was "too permanent". So, they reached out to a local organization and got more information about "supporting gender creative youth" and offered to attend medical appointments with Zain. He welcomed the support. Both parents call Zain while he's been away at school and maintain a good relationship. Every now and again, they ensure to ask if he's experiencing transphobia and if his social spaces feel safe. Both parents tell their friends the story of how much joy they felt the day they went in to the hospital for him to get his top surgery. Mom shares, "Part of me was grieving because I had always wanted a daughter. But then I reminded myself that Zain was always his own person; he didn't exist to fulfill my fantasies." And Dad shares, "We knew how important this was for our son to feel like himself and his joy was an affirmation that we're the best Muslim parents."





Case 5

Muhsin and Rida are twin brothers aged 19. Muhsin is gay and Rida is bisexual. They've been open about their sexuality since age 14. When they told their parents, Mom was in tears and Dad was furious. Dad said they had brought shame to the family and they were no longer welcome in the family home. Both brothers were effectively disowned and homeless. They packed a duffle bag each and went to the school's guidance counsellor who helped get them connected to a shelter. Of course, their academic studies were affected; they went from being A students to C students but they still passed and completed high school. They always carried shame for living in a youth shelter and tried to hide this from their peers at school.

When they turned 18, they qualified for a government program that helped them find a rent-controlled apartment. Mushin is doing college part time and working in a plumbing apprenticeship and Rida is working as a barista. Together they can afford their rent. They both struggle with PTSD and Rida has been able to start seeking therapy through work benefits. His therapist asked, "Before you and your brother came out to your parents, what were you imagining their response would be?" Rida said, "Well, we knew they would have a hard time with it. Muhsin and I even joked that maybe they'd think I was only half-bad because I was still attracted to girls. But honestly, I remember hearing my mom say 'only Allah can judge us' a handful of times and my dad once commented that 'people become gay because they don't get enough love'.

Neither of these statements are comforting if I'm being honest but neither my brother or I expected to be homeless within 12 hours of coming out to our parents." Then the therapist asked, "Based on your father's comment, do you think he blames himself for not loving you enough?" Rida replied, "You know, I'm so angry with him I don't even care what he felt. And I'm even more angry with my mom for letting this happen to us. I used to pray that Mom would come find us in the youth shelter and bring us home. Now I dream that one day I'll find out from someone else that they both died....*Rida cries*...and then I'll feel safe again."





Discussion Questions

1. How did you feel reading each of the scenarios?
2. The themes that will have emerged across the scenarios are: avoidance, pressure, denial, intolerance and being supportive. Which of these themes reminded you of your own family story? Or, which scenario really affected you personally?
3. Have you found yourself in a position where you thought you're showing acceptance but your loved one has felt like it hasn't been enough?
4. How did this exercise help you reflect on the concept of acceptance in your family?

Check-out

Share a scenario that may be lingering in your mind that you want help (from your peers) to place on the Acceptance Spectrum. You may also choose to pass.





SESSION 6: LGBTQ+ People “Back Home”

Note: The facilitator will need to do background research on LGBTQ+ communities in participants' cultures of origin before the session. The facilitator will need to source articles, video clips, documentaries or stories for this session.

Check In

When and where did you first meet someone whom you thought (or knew) was LGBTQ+?

Lightning Round

Can everyone tell us what is your country of origin and what is your sense of the LGBTQ+ community there?

Activity

The facilitator presents artefacts that attest to the existence, resistance, mobilization, activism, and/or oppression in each of the countries where clients identify their origins. After each artefact is shown, a discussion is encouraged about what the participants now remember or about what they've now learned in this short process.

Note: this session requires significant facilitator preparation. Facilitators can begin their search with LGBTQ-affirming organizations in many Muslim-majority countries. Below is a list to get you started.

[Boys of Bangladesh](#)

Boys of Bangladesh, formerly known as Boys Only Bangladesh, is the oldest running and the largest network of self-identified Bangladeshi gay men living in the country and abroad.

[Bedayya](#)

Advocacy and support for queer and trans people in the Nile Valley area (Egypt and Sudan)

[Mesahat for Sexual & Gender Diversity](#)

Creates safe spaces, supports activists, and advocates against violence and discrimination for sexual and gender minorities in the Nile Valley area.





[IraQueer](#)

Increasing visibility and awareness amongst and about the local LGBTQ+ community through sharing information, news, and personal stories in Arabic, Kurdish, and English. Also provides training and workshops related to human rights for LGBTQ+ individuals, for activists and other allies.

[LGBT Jordan](#)

Jordanian Twitter platform that focuses on body, gender and sexual diversity in Jordan and highlights online content on queer-related topics in the Arabic language.

[Helem](#)

A non-governmental organization working towards justice and equality for all LGBTIQ+ people in Lebanon and the South West Asian/North African (SWANA) region.

[Musawah](#)

Musawah (meaning 'equality' in Arabic) is a global movement for equality and justice in the Muslim family.

[Sisters in Islam](#)

A non-governmental organization working towards advancing the rights of Muslim women in Malaysia. They promote the principles of gender equality, justice, freedom and dignity in Islam and empower women to be advocates for change.

[Khawaja Sira Society \(Lahore\)](#)

A registered non-governmental and Transgender/Hijra community-based organization working in the field of HIV/AIDS and health related issues of Transgender (TGs)/Hijra since 2012. Contact info@kss.org.pk

[Dareecha \(Rawalpindi/Islamabad\)](#)

An organization solely working towards the health conditions, health restoration, and social welfare of the Transgender and MSM communities of Rawalpindi.

[Dostana Male Society \(Lahore\)](#)

Strives for the advancement of the social and health rights of men who have sex with men and other marginalized groups by strengthening community systems and developing community led interventions with focus on addressing stigma.





[Parwaz Male Society](#) (Karachi)

A community based organization with the mission to improve the sexual health, welfare and human rights for men who have sex with men (MSM) and their partners in Karachi, Pakistan.

[LGBT Voice](#)

A registered national LGBT organization working to advance equality, diversity, education, and justice for queer and trans people in Tanzania.

[Association Shams](#)

Stands against homophobia while also fostering respectful debate on homosexuality in society.

[Kaos GL](#)

One of the oldest and largest LGBT rights organisations in Turkey.

Check Out

If someone said to you, “Being gay or trans is a Western thing,” how would you respond in one sentence?





SESSION 7: Support and Allyship

Check In

Share one example of how you helped or stood by someone who was experiencing a challenge that you've never personally experienced.

What is an Ally?

Facilitator to briefly define "ally" and name the types without defining them: Advocate, Confidant, Upstander, Scholar and Amplifier. The specific meanings will emerge through the case scenarios.

Exercise: Match the type of ally with the descriptions below.

Scenario 1 Mehrun has been in a same-sex relationship for 5 years. Her sister Nuri is heterosexual and their parents have not been very supportive of Mehrun. Nevertheless, Nuri wants to support her sister. Lately, Mehrun has been struggling with some issues in her relationship. She's not sure if she wants to work on it or end things with her partner whom she still loves deeply. Nuri doesn't have the answers to her sister's life challenges but listens thoughtfully and creates a space for her sister to express her fears, frustrations and needs.

Nuri is what type of ally? _____


Advocate | Confidant | Upstander | Scholar | Amplifier

Scenario 2 Ahmed, age 46, was feeling quite uncertain and ambivalent about his marriage after his wife Ayan of 10 years came out to him as bisexual about 6 months ago. He initially felt a bit betrayed; like he's been married to someone he didn't know at all! Nevertheless, they've been having ongoing conversations about the purpose of her sharing this with him and she's reiterated that she has no intention of leaving the marriage. Rather, she's been feeling isolated and scared about expressing who she truly is to one of the most important people in her life. Today, they're actually stronger than ever and much of it is because Ahmed went to the local LGBTQ+ organization and found a support group for straight partners of LGBTQ+ people. He has also bought books and taken an interest in online publications concerning LGBTQ+ issues, the coming out process, and how to be a supportive partner. They've watched a few Netflix series that are LGBTQ+-themed and it has prompted some great discussion about culture, norms, relationship conventions, and more. He's been cautious not to insert his opinion into any conversation too quickly; rather, he's committed to learning.

Ahmed is what type of ally? _____

Advocate | Confidant | Upstander | Scholar | Amplifier





Scenario 3 Subhan is 35, straight, and married with a toddler. His younger sister Karima is 19 years old and goes to a college not far from her family home and lives with her parents. She finds that her parents are much more restrictive with her than they were with her brother; plus, he lived away from home when he was in school. For example, last week Karima was planning to go to a movie with her girlfriend and an ex-boyfriend of hers—yes, they’re all friends! Her dad said that he had a bad feeling about her being out on a Friday night and then her mom said she hadn’t seen much of Karima all week and was hoping to watch a movie with her at home. Karima is frustrated because she feels guilty into staying at home. She mentioned this to Subhan and she said, “I really don’t know what to do because I just don’t want to live there anymore.” The next day, Subhan had lunch with his parents and said to them, “look, there’s a double-standard between myself and Karima; you used to let me go out or were okay with not knowing what I was up to when I lived away....also the “stay at home comments” make Karima feel guilty and may actually be veiled homophobia....like, are you guys uncomfortable with her going out with her girlfriend?” For Subhan, he wants to use his power and privilege to bring his parents into the conversations that feel hard for his sister.

Subhan is what type of ally? _____

Advocate | Confidant | Upstander | Scholar | Amplifier

Scenario 4 Lulwa was on public transit and she overheard a group of young men making fun of each other and one of them said, “you’re such a fag” to one of his friends. Lulwa didn’t know them but was very upset hearing this language. She interrupted them and said, “excuse me, can you folks be more mindful of the language you’re using in this public space? My younger brother is gay and if he were on this bus, it would be unfair for him to have to endure this type of casual homophobia.” The young men were taken aback and apologized. Lulwa felt good about her decision to say something; she really feels it’s her job to respond to wrongdoings and act to combat them.

Lulwa is what type of ally? _____

Advocate | Confidant | Upstander | Scholar | Amplifier

Scenario 5 Tayeeb is attending an iftar for LGBTQ+ Muslims. Ramadan was always important for him and his family. However, after losing touch with them, he’s been longing for a place like this to celebrate all the parts of him. While at the iftar, a few people are having a conversation about Islamophobia people had experienced at work. However, his friend Neema was trying to speak and someone interjected before she began. He knew what was happening here – the same sexist dynamics that happen at his workplace. He interrupted everyone and said, “actually, I think Neema was trying to say something about her experience.”

Tayeeb is what type of ally? _____

Advocate | Confidant | Upstander | Scholar | Amplifier





Discussion Questions

- Which of the scenarios do you think taught you about allyship the most?
- Which type of ally do you think you are or want to be for your LGBTQ+ family member?
- Have there been instances where you could have been a better ally to your loved one? When you look back, how would you do things differently? How can you do things differently now?

Final Session Check-Out

We're saying farewell today! We'd like to ask each person to share:

- What's changed in your life since beginning this group?
- Is there gratitude people want to share for each other for holding space for one another?
- Would it be helpful for you to keep in touch with other members of the group? (it's okay if the answer is no)

