

## Loving Our Children with Same-Sex Attractions: One Mother's Story

by "An EnCourage Mom"

If you're concerned about your daughter or son's same-sex attractions (SSA), I hope I might offer you hope by sharing my story with you.

When I learned that my daughter experienced SSA, I was challenged to grow spiritually, emotionally, and in knowledge of the truth regarding the Church's teaching on homosexuality. Initially I was in turmoil; over time, I understood that in order to help my daughter I would have to proceed from a center of peace and trust—and that center was alongside Jesus. I learned that only Christ could calm my troubled heart and equip me to love both my child *and* the truth about human sexuality. Through sincere prayer and perseverance, I received the grace to be a caring and effective parent to my child.

Initially overwhelmed by my daughter's admission of SSA, I didn't know where to turn. For weeks, I suffered anguish and pain, emotional and spiritual weakness. Through prayer, I was led to admit that I didn't know how to help my daughter with this complex problem—everything I had tried during my time of despair had failed. In great grief, I surrendered myself into the arms of our Heavenly Father, embracing my suffering without question or blame. Soon I began to feel comforted by God, to feel loved and secure. I felt the presence of Jesus, and so began to trust Him with all my heart.

Through a deep prayer life, daily scripture reading and studying scientific research, I became convinced of two things: 1) my daughter was not born with any genetic or biological factor that would, of itself, lead to SSA, and 2) God would show me the way to help her.

Through continued prayer and trust that the Holy Spirit would guide me at the proper time, I became less intense, more relaxed and able to live in hopeful anticipation. Months later, in an unexpected shower of grace, God showed me a path to help my daughter. God wanted me to focus not on my own anxieties but on my daughter's inner being and emotional needs.

With Christ as my strength, I learned to look at my young adult daughter with "new eyes." I wanted to know her better and so made efforts to be friendly, kind, and respectful, as if she were a friend's daughter. I let go of my "mother-mode" and did not moralize or attempt to instruct or direct her, since I was the one learning. I made a determined effort to respond positively in our conversations. If her statements upset me, I remained silent or offered a neutral comment. I avoided arguments as I knew they could only take us back to square one. I was thrilled when my daughter responded to my new way of relating. She seemed to feel safer and in time began to share more of her feelings and to talk about her work and her friends.

Sometimes it took great strength for me not express my despair or disagreement during our conversations. As her trust in my ability *to hear and accept her as she was* increased, my daughter relaxed and began to ask an occasional question, interested in and open to my views. One day the Holy Spirit inspired me to express my beliefs, based on scientific research, that SSA was not inborn. My conviction gave my daughter hope. From this place of hopeful beginning, along with our new relationship, she found strength to look at family and life events that might have affected the development of her feminine identity. She began to trust God's plan for her as a woman. After more than half a year of our new way of relating—not always a smooth path—my daughter ended her SSA relationship. In the years that followed, God helped my daughter in so many ways. She is now blessed to be a happy wife and mother.

Here is the plan that God revealed to me in my journey. I pray you too will be guided as you learn to love and help your child with SSA, always with hope and trust in our Lord.

### 1) Draw Near to God

God waits for us with open arms. We can go to our Heavenly Father as His children. In His presence, we can release our pain and seek His comfort. We can receive the love of Christ by attending Mass, Eucharistic Adoration, and Confession, and by reading Scripture. A foreseeable effect of our closer union with Christ is that we become more available to be instruments of His providence according to His will. If we allow ourselves to receive God's love to the fullest, then we can truly give God's love to our children. Adoration provides a wonderful opportunity for us to unburden our hearts. We must be willing to look at ourselves and our own behavior, allowing the Holy Spirit to teach us. We can ask the Blessed Mother and the Saints to intercede for us and for our children.

### 2) Grow Closer to Your Child

It is very helpful to look at our children with "new eyes," looking past the surface to find their inner goodness. It is essential that we spend more time with our children, communicating in a calm, friendly manner. Most important, we must learn to be good listeners. It is important to trust that our children love us even though we may feel distress or distance in the relationship. If we feel unloved by our children, we can pray for a breakthrough in which we will experience his or her love for us. Reflecting on loving times in the past is a good way to connect with our children, for example looking with them through family photo albums in order to review our family "history." If we see our children as beloved children of God and trust that God has good plans for our lives, our hearts—and theirs—might open, and our bond will be strengthened.

I've learned that the parent who is the same sex as the child is the one who must move closer—a mother to her daughter and a father to his son. If we are mothers of a son, our role is to help our husbands move closer. We might offer ideas and be supportive, but we may also need to take a step back in order that our husbands' roles might become more important. A father of a daughter must encourage and support his wife in reaching out to their daughter. Each parent must model the traits of his or her gender since a SSA child most likely has an incompletely developed sexual identity, boys with masculinity and girls with femininity.

If our child lives at home or nearby, opportunities for interaction will be plentiful. Even so, it will require a sustained effort on our parts to plan such interactions. If our child is away, perhaps living in an SSA relationship or away at school, the situation is more challenging. We can try to find ways to increase contact by phone, email, or in person. This may not be easy; we may give but not receive. And we should strive to see our child without his or her friend. As a parent, we have the power of love; believe in it, and use it.

### 3) Prepare for the Journey

Our journey requires that we become educated regarding the research about SSA as well as about Church teaching on the issue. These scientific facts and spiritual truths strengthen our understanding and purpose. Then we are better able to journey with God, reaching out to our children with love and strengthened by the power of Truth. A good online resource is NARTH, the website of the National Association for Research and Therapy of Homosexuality, a professional and scientific organization offering hope through information, therapeutic approaches, and referrals. If a child is open to counseling, NARTH offers resources. NARTH also provides the research against "born that way" arguments. [www.narth.com](http://www.narth.com)

And of course, there is the Courage website you are now viewing, the site of the Courage International Apostolate of the Catholic Church. Courage ministers to those with SSA and, through EnCourage, to their loved ones. This site offers church documents on SSA, articles, descriptions of Courage and EnCourage support groups, location listings, and many other resources including books, audios, and DVDs. I especially recommend the EnCourage Listserv, the confidential, online support group for parents.

I pray that you too will go forward with faith and courage to receive God's love and truth, and that your path to accept, love and help your child with SSA will become clear.

## A Special Note to the Mothers of Daughters with SSA

The mother-daughter journey is one of the heart. Our daughters yearn for connection with us even though they may not express this. They may long for a “home” where they can safely and lovingly complete the development of their feminine identity. This development, usually a natural maturation process, has been frustrated somewhere along the way. Our daughters seek what they lack by desiring relationships with other women in ways that will retard, rather than promote, healthy growth of sexual identity. We mothers can be of direct and vital help to our daughters’ completion of their feminine development. We will first be challenged to strengthen and repair our relationships with our daughters, entering into their thoughts and feelings, and gathering information that will help us understand the origins of their SSA. There are many factors which contribute to the disruption of feminine identity development including negative perceptions of females, lack of same-sex peers, emotional or sexual abuse, and emotional dependencies. As we uncover evidence of underlying factors, we will have the opportunity for many heart-to-heart talks with our daughters. This sharing must take place at the right time, after we have established the important foundation of safety, trust, and attachment.

Our daughters will not be able to accept our help or receive our love until they feel safe and secure in their relationships with us. Feeling safe leads to trust and trust leads to attachment. A secure attachment is one where mother and daughter share thoughts, feelings, and affection. The first step of establishing safety is a difficult one because we mothers often *assume* our daughters feel loved and safe. The reality is, they may not. SSA is a big cross to bear—it makes our daughters feel different, confused, misunderstood, insecure, and even unloved. Working on safety requires a new beginning. This is why it helps to look at our daughter with “new eyes.” This technique can move us out of “mother mode” and prevent moralizing and negativity. It is extremely important to avoid arguments, to reduce stress and to increase positive interaction, if only one sentence at a time. It helps to rephrase and reflect what our daughters say. This can let them know that we have heard—not necessarily agreed with—their statements. As my daughter felt safer with me, she shared more; as she shared more I learned more about her thoughts and feelings. In a way, we must be detectives gathering vital information. At the same time, we must be nurturers, affirming all that is good in our daughters.

Once we have completed the step of creating safety and allow our daughters to rest with us in this safe place, trust will grow. As we continue to be nurturing, affection and attachment become real. Now we are ready for heart-to-heart talks. Our daughters have the opportunity to grow and heal when God’s love and truth flow through us to them.

It helps if we go back daily to a place of peace with Christ and attune our heart to Him. In addition, every one of us has a special advocate in heaven, the Blessed Mother. Let’s allow her to enfold us within her mantle and love us as her daughters. Mary has countless graces which she desires to give mothers. We can trust Mary in the same way that we want our daughter to trust us. If we did not experience a nurturing, tender love with our own mothers, it is even more important for us to turn to Mary. She will love us with a mother-love that is powerful beyond any earthly love. With the Blessed Mother, we have all of heaven’s resources to the mother-love needed to help our daughters. Mother-love can find the path into a daughter’s heart.