Holidays, weddings, funerals and other family gatherings can be challenging times for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer or Questioning (LGBTQ+) clients. It is a time when your clients may traditionally get together and engage in family and religious rituals. For LGBTQ+ people whose families are not affirming, it may mean making a choice between being with their family of origin, being with a family of choice (friends and loved ones), or being alone. Here are some tips to help you to prepare your LGBTQ+ clients navigate family gatherings:

**How to help**

Sadly, for many LGBTQ+ individuals who come from families that are rejecting there are very real behavioral health consequences. From the ground-breaking work of the Family Acceptance Project we know that youth that come from highly rejecting families are at:

- 6 x increased risk of depression
- 5.5 x increased risk for suicidal ideation
- 8 x increased risk for suicide attempts
- 3 x increased use of illegal drugs
- 3 x increased risk of HIV/STD

There is every reason to believe that family rejection is harmful to LGBTQ+ people of all ages. For example, older LGBTQ+ individuals are at risk for increased social isolation due to discrimination and rejection. Additionally, LGBTQ+ elders may also be navigating the loss of their support group as their friends age, become less mobile, or pass away. This group of LGBTQ+ people is less likely to have children who can care for them as they age. These circumstances may result in the connections they have to their biological family becoming even more pronounced. All these stressors can become especially challenging during holidays and family gatherings.

**Rejecting behaviors are actions that reject the person’s identity. Here are some examples:**

1. Refusing to acknowledge the person your client is dating.
2. Refusing to use the correct name and pronoun.
3. Trying to change the person’s sexual orientation or gender identity through prayer, counseling, or by getting them to date someone of the opposite gender.
4. Asking your client to hide their identity or dress in a way that is uncomfortable to them.
5. Not including your client in family events or traditions.

**Things to Consider When Your LGBTQ+ Clients Plan to Attend Family Gatherings**

- Before they go to family events, ask your LGBTQ+ client if their family is a source of support and affirmation. If not, support them considering their options and making a “family gathering self-care plan.”
- In supporting your LGBTQ+ client’s plans for attending a family gathering, ask them:
  - What they hope to occur
  - What are they anticipating will occur
  - What they are willing to ignore
  - What they will not stand for
Your client’s family may be as anxious as your client is about the upcoming family gathering. This is especially true if your client has recently come out, has started dressing differently, is going by a different name, or announced they have a partner. By developing and sharing ground rules for the visit, your client is helping everyone to know what to expect and how to be affirming. Many families want to be supportive and sometimes need help knowing what that looks like. So it is important that your client be as clear as possible about what they need. As a provider, you can help them process and think through their expectations, plan, and self-care strategies.