

Helping parents deal with the shock and denial

Chantal Abitbol

SHOCK, disappointment and shame are among the emotions which parents frequently experience when first confronted with their child's homosexuality. JewishCare has set up a parents support group to help parents come to terms with such feelings.

Led by two therapists, the group meets at JewishCare in Bondi Junction every Tuesday at 6pm. The inaugural meeting was held this week.

"There is a great need for parents of gays and lesbians to share their anxieties,"

JewishCare family and community services manager Dr Ilan Buchman said. "The group provides a support forum to exchange views and experiences in a warm, accepting environment. It's often more comforting to receive advice from a parent in the same situation than from a therapist. They're all at different stages of acceptance, and those who have gone through a similar experience can provide others with insight."

Emphasising the need for parents to understand the difficulties faced by their children in coming out, he

added: "The main purpose of the group is to work towards greater acceptance and develop a better relationship with their children."

Judy Kell, co-convener for the Dayenu Association for Jewish Gays and Lesbians, knows first-hand how difficult this can be. "When I came out, my mother was not shocked, but not thrilled either. But what she really wanted was for me to keep quiet."

This is a common reaction, especially for Jewish parents, who come from a minority culture with established customs and beliefs, she said.

"There are cultural expectations to get married and have children. Then they find out that their child will not necessarily meet their expectations, and it is a huge deal for them."

With patience and a level of openness, however, parents eventually come to terms with the issues, she said. "Ten years later, I'm speaking about my homosexuality in the papers and my mother is fine with that. She's even thinking of joining us for the Mardi Gras march. I'd love to walk with her; it would be wonderful."

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Dr Ilan Buchman