

# Opening the Straight Spouse's Closet

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Some straight people feel resentment that, when their husbands or wives come out as gay, there are many Web sites, events, publications, and social groups waiting to welcome the gays to their new lives. But the straight spouses are left alone, mired in embarrassment, confusion, and feelings of abandonment.

At a National PFLAG convention about 20 years ago, a group of people who sought support because their spouses had come out as gay set up a resource table and conducted a workshop. That was the start of the Straight Spouse Network, which was operated as an affiliate of National PFLAG until it became a separate organization a few years ago. It has grown in size and impact and is now an international organization widely recognized for its mission:

- **Reaching Out:** Expand visibility and access to support for current or former straight spouses/partners of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender mates, and for mixed-orientation couples.
- **Healing:** Increase resources that help spouses/partners and mixed-orientation couples lessen their pain, cope constructively, and nurture their inner strength, to rebuild their lives.
- **Building Bridges:** Foster understanding between spouses/partners and within the larger community, through education and collaboration, including partnering with professional and community organizations.

The SSN state and country contacts put straight spouses in touch with one another and provide resources to help them cope constructively with shock, hurt, anger and self-blame; issues of deception and betrayal; powerlessness and grief; AIDS, STD's and other health issues; and effects on children and other relatives. Each couple's story is unique: Surprisingly, not every marriage breaks up. Some couples remain together in what is termed a "mixed orientation marriage."

Support groups operate in many communities across the United States and in several foreign countries. Network mentors help spouses or therapists set up new support groups. The SSN publishes a newsletter and holds regional and national conferences. Outreach members present spouse and family issues to professionals, community and faith-based organizations and the media. After the movie "Brokeback Mountain" opened, calls and emails to the SSN increased immeasurably, and many mainstream newspapers published interviews with the founder, Amity Buxton, who had written the pamphlet, "Opening the Straight Spouse's Closet," and other publications. To learn more about the SSN, or to contribute to their work, you may visit their Web site, [www.straightspouse.org](http://www.straightspouse.org) ▼