THE FREEDOM TO MARRY

Why Non-Gay People Care and What We Can Do About It
Non-gay people have a stake in this struggle, too. Many of us simply feel that it is wrong to discriminate on the basis of sex and sexual orientation. Others feel strongly about marriage equality because of our values, and we have friends, family members, neighbors, or coworkers who are harmed by discrimination in our marriage laws. Some of us even feel a little embarrassed that we are able to marry when people we care about are denied that freedom. All of us want to be fair – and learned to treat others as we would want to be treated.

Just as we have different concerns that make us care about marriage equality, we also have different comfort levels about whether or how we want to demonstrate our concern. Some of us have spoken out publicly as individuals or worked through PFLAG (Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays) and other civil rights organizations to testify or lobby in state legislatures. Others have joined in marches and demonstrations to show their support. Still others have worked quietly in their own communities – schools, workplaces, and houses of worship – to change hearts and minds, one person at a time.

Whatever brings you to this conversation about marriage and fairness, you are a welcome and necessary partner in the work we do at Freedom to Marry. We’d like to help you make your voice heard.

**So where are you on fairness and marriage equality?**

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<td>I’m conflicted about Marriage Equality. I want to support the gay people in my life but my religion or culture says homosexuality is wrong.</td>
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<td>I support Marriage Equality but I haven’t yet found a way to get involved</td>
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<td>I support Marriage Equality and I am already active</td>
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<td>I’m neutral about Marriage Equality. I don’t oppose it but I don’t know anyone who is affected by it.</td>
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If you oppose marriage equality:

We’re sorry that you’re not currently with us on this important question of fairness, equality and economic justice. Still, we hope that you’ll keep reading, thinking, and talking about the question with people you know — gay and non-gay alike — who hold a variety of views.

When you meet a gay person who wants to get married, ask him or her why it matters so much. You might find that gay people want to be married for the same sorts of reasons that non-gay people do.

If you don’t get the opportunity to talk to someone in person, you can read about it in Evan Wolfson’s book, Why Marriage Matters: America, Equality & Gay People’s Right to Marry. When you meet non-gay people who support marriage equality, ask them why they care, since it doesn’t affect them personally. You might be surprised by the answers.

If you’re conflicted about marriage equality because you are uncomfortable about homosexuality, or have religious issues, or are not sure what the consequences will be — but also want to be fair:

We appreciate that you feel you’re in a difficult and possibly painful place. You may sometimes feel that you’re the rope in a big tug-of-war: on the one side you’re pulled by the love you feel for a gay friend or family member, the respect you feel for a gay coworker, the friendliness you feel toward a gay neighbor, or even your respect for issues of social justice and equality; on the other side you may feel pulled by old stereotypes or anxiety, or rules that you were taught as a part of your religion or culture. You want fair treatment for the lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people you know, but maybe feel that you can’t support marriage equality because you believe that homosexuality is wrong.

Keep learning about your faith: If you want some resources on faith and homosexuality, we suggest that you visit Soulforce (www.soulforce.org), or HRC’s “Religious Life” web area (www.hrc.org). In addition, you might want to read Bishop John Shelby Spong’s Rescuing the Bible from Fundamentalism: A Bishop Rethinks the Meaning of Scripture, or Dr. Daniel Helminiac’s What the Bible Says and Doesn’t Say About Homosexuality. It might help you to know that several faith traditions have embraced marriage for same-sex couples, and see nothing inconsistent between the dictates of their religion and the blessing of same-sex marriages.
These include: the United Church of Christ; American Baptist Churches; the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ); Quakers; Central Conference of American Rabbis (Reform Judaism); Ecumenical Catholic Church; Alliance for Jewish Renewal; The Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association (Reconstructionist Judaism); Unitarian Universalist Association; Universal Fellowship of the Metropolitan Community Churches (MCC); Episcopal Church; Presbyterian Church (USA).

Get informed about the distinction between civil marriage and religious marriage: Another point to consider is that many people of faith support civil marriage for same-sex couples even if their faith community reserves the sacrament of marriage for heterosexual couples. Indeed, many clergy have signed the Marriage Resolution, attached at the back of this document, calling for civil marriage equality for same-sex couples.

Talk to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and/or transgender people in your life about marriage and why it matters: We understand that you live with a difficult tension, and, though we disagree, we respect your position. You have to struggle with it in your own way and at your own pace. Our hope is that you’ll resolve the tension in favor of the gay people you know and love and in favor of fairness, the golden Rule (treating others as you want to be treated), and the American Way (equality under the law). Talking with them about marriage might shed some light on what’s at stake, and might help you reconcile your faith with your sense of fairness. As one devout mother said to her son when he told her he was gay: “I love the church, but I love you more.”

Glen Dehn and Charles Blackburn

Charles is retired after working for 25 years as a fundraiser for institutions in the Baltimore area, including the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra and the Johns Hopkins School of Medicine. Ordained a Unitarian minister in 1962, Charles was heavily involved in the civil rights movement in Alabama in the mid 60s and then became an organizer for the American Civil Liberties Union in ten southern states. Glen, 67, is retired after 31 years of legislative planning and analysis for the U.S. Social Security Administration. They live in Baltimore and have been together for more than 26 years.

As senior citizens, Charles and Glen are healthy and active. They enjoy traveling around the world and share interests in art, theater and classical music. They are living their “golden years” to the fullest, but worry about what will happen to them when the time comes to slow down. Without the benefits and protections of marriage, the decades Charles and Glen have spent together could be at risk. As a retired federal employee, Glen has excellent health benefits and coverage that he cannot share with Charles.

“We are concerned about being separated in a nursing home,” Charles says. “We are so grateful to have each other; we’d hate to be alone as gay seniors. But we fear we might end up alone if we can’t protect our relationship.”

To read about more couples, like Glen & Charles, who have shared the stories of their lives, their love and their families on our Story Center, log on to www.freedomtomarry.org.
If you’re neutral about marriage equality because you don’t know anyone affected by it:

We understand that it might be difficult to engage with an issue that seems to have little relationship to your life. If you don’t know people who are harmed by the inability to marry the person they love, the entire issue might seem a bit abstract. But for many same-sex couples and their families, the issue is quite concrete and the harm is very real. So what can you do to help?

Learn about same-sex couples and their struggle for the freedom to marry: Most couples marry for love and the desire to reinforce the personal commitment they have made to each other. Most also want the public statement of commitment and support that marriage offers. The intangible benefits that marriage offers many families include clarity, security, structure, dignity, spiritual significance, and an expectation of permanence, dedication, and stability. Like non-gay couples, same-sex couples share these aspirations and needs.

Log on to our website at www.freedomtomarry.org to visit our Story Center. There you can read the stories of same-sex couples from across the country who share how exclusion from civil marriage has harmed them and their families and why winning an end to discrimination in marriage matters to them personally.

In addition, according to a 2004 report from the U.S. General Accounting Office, there are at least 1,138 tangible benefits, protections, rights, and responsibilities that marriage brings couples and their kids—and that’s just at the federal level. Add in state and local law, and the policies of businesses, employers, universities, and other institutions, and it is clear that the denial of marriage to couples and their kids makes a substantial impact on every area of life, from raising kids, building a life together, and caring for one another, to retirement, death, and inheritance.

Most of these cannot be secured by private agreement or through lawyers.

From death to taxes and in between, here are just a few of the ways in which government’s denying the freedom to marry punishes couples and families by depriving them of critical tangible as well as intangible protections and responsibilities in virtually every area of life:

- **Death:** If a couple is not married and one partner dies, the other partner is not entitled to bereavement leave from work, to file wrongful death claims, to draw the Social Security of the deceased partner, or to automatically inherit a shared home, assets, or personal items in the absence of a will.
- **Debts:** Unmarried partners do not generally have responsibility for each other’s debt.
- **Divorce:** Unmarried couples do not have access to the courts, structure, or guidelines in times of break-up, including rules for how to handle shared property, child support, and alimony, or protecting the weaker party and kids.

Nobody can say that their family is a real family and my family is just a bunch of people living in the same house.
—Robbie Barnett-Kemper, Age 11
• **Family leave:** Unmarried couples are often not covered by laws and policies that permit people to take medical leave to care for a sick spouse or for their children.

• **Health:** Unlike spouses, unmarried partners are usually not considered next of kin for the purposes of hospital visitation and emergency medical decisions. In addition, they can’t cover their families on their health plans without paying additional taxes on the coverage, nor are they eligible for Medicare and Medicaid coverage.

• **Housing:** Denied marriage, couples of lesser means are not recognized and thus can be denied or disfavored in their applications for public housing.

• **Immigration:** U.S. residency and family unification are not available to an unmarried partner from another country.

• **Inheritance:** Unmarried surviving partners do not automatically inherit property should their loved one die without a will, nor do they get legal protection for inheritance rights such as elective share or bypassing the hassles and expenses of probate court.

• **Insurance:** Unmarried partners can’t always sign up for joint home and auto insurance. In addition, many employers don’t cover domestic partners or their biological or non-biological children in their health insurance plans.

• **Portability:** Unlike marriages, which are honored in all states and countries, civil unions, domestic partnerships and other alternative mechanisms only exist in a few states and countries, are not given any legal acknowledgment in most, and leave families without the clarity and security of knowing what their legal status and rights will be.

• **Parenting:** Unmarried couples are denied the automatic right to joint parenting, joint adop-

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**Gita Deane and Lisa Polyak**

Gita is a learning specialist at Goucher College. Lisa is an environmental engineer for the U.S. Army Medical Department. They live in Baltimore, have been together for 24 years and are raising two daughters, ages six and nine. Gita and Lisa met their freshman year at Trinity College in Washington, D.C. As a citizen of India, Gita was in the United States on a student visa. When they fell in love and wanted to build a life together, it was apparent immigration laws would force them apart.

Had Lisa and Gita been recognized as spouses, they could easily have remained together. Because they couldn’t marry, the couple embarked on a years-long odyssey to establish residency for Gita. There were many anxious moments -- like a deportation notice and a tearful goodbye at JFK airport -- when the distraught couple did not know if Gita would ever be able to return to the United States. Fortunately, Gita received a work sponsorship and was granted full U.S. citizenship in 1994.

Gita and Lisa want marriage rights to further protect their relationship and children from other harms, and to ensure that no loving couple will have to be torn apart because of political borders.

*To read about more couples, like Gita & Lisa, who have shared the stories of their lives, their love and their families on our Story Center, log on to www.freedomtomarry.org.*
tion, joint foster care, and visitation for non-biological parents. In addition, the children of unmarried couples are denied the guarantee of child support and an automatic legal relationship to both parents, and are sent a negative message about their own status and family.

- **Privilege:** Unmarried couples are not protected against having to testify against each other in judicial proceedings, and are also usually denied the coverage in crime victims counseling and protection programs afforded married couples.
- **Property:** Unmarried couples are excluded from special rules that permit married couples to buy and own property together under favorable terms, rules that protect married couples in their shared homes and rules regarding the distribution of the property in the event of death or divorce.
- **Retirement:** In addition to being denied access to shared or spousal benefits through Social Security as well as coverage under Medicare and other programs, unmarried couples are denied withdrawal rights and protective tax treatment given to spouses with regard to IRA's and other retirement plans.
- **Taxes:** Unmarried couples cannot file joint tax returns and are excluded from tax benefits and claims specific to marriage. In addition, they are denied the right to transfer property to one another and pool the family’s resources without adverse tax consequences.

**If you’re a parent, think about your own children:** As a loving parent, you no doubt hope that your child can grow to adulthood with a sense of freedom to make his own choices and become her own person. You probably hope that your child will find a soulmate and begin a family. If you’re like most of us, you assume that marriage will be the most supportive environment in which to make that commitment and raise that family.

Now consider that there is some chance the child you love may grow up to be gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Would that really change your hopes and dreams for your child? Maybe it is time to start working for the fairness and freedom all loving parents want their children to receive – no matter who they are. And for those of our children who aren’t gay, do we really want to teach them it’s okay to look down on others who are different? Or do we want them to grow up prepared to thrive in a diverse world, in a country that treats people equally and with respect?

**If you support marriage equality but haven’t found a way to be active:**

We’re glad that you support fairness for same-sex couples and their families. Are you ready to put that support into action? Here are a few things to consider:

**You might need some guidance about “coming out” as an ally:** becoming more vocal and visible as an ally can be a little bit like “coming out” as an LGBT person. It reveals something about your identity and values, and may trigger interactions with other people that require some preparation. Parents, Friends and Family of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) has developed materials that can encourage and assist you in this process. These, and other materials developed by Freedom to Marry and our partners are available online at www.freedomtomarry.org.
Nigel Simon and Alvin Williams

Alvin is a dentist in private practice after retiring from the U.S. Army where he was a dental officer. Nigel is a program manager for the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Nigel served in the U.S. Army National guard as a military police specialist. They live in Upper Marlboro, MD, and have been together for six years. They have an adopted 7-year-old son, and are in the process of adopting another 7-year-old boy and his 9-year-old sister. Alvin and Nigel attend worship services at Covenant Baptist Church. They met at a discussion group for black gay men. “It was love at first sight,” Alvin says. “I have long felt as married as anyone who loves and lives with their spouse, raises kids, owns a home, and even drives a minivan,” says Nigel. “Although we are a family in every way imaginable, a family with one military veteran and one federal employee, we are not fully protected as a family under the law.”

To read about more couples, like Alvin & Nigel, who have shared the stories of their lives, their love and their families on our Story Center, log on to www.freedomtomarry.org.

Read about other non-gay people who have become active: it can be very encouraging to know that there are people like yourself who have chosen to become more involved in the marriage movement. You can read their stories in Dan Woog’s book, Friends & Family: True Stories of Gay America’s Straight Allies.

Talk to gay and non-gay friends who are involved in the movement: if you know someone who has volunteered for a marriage equality organization, ask them to take you along to a meeting or forward to you any emails they receive about the group’s activities.

Once you’re ready to put your beliefs into action. Consider some of the ideas to follow.

If you support Marriage Equality and are already active:

Wonderful! We appreciate your support and engagement! Whether you’ve attending meetings, spoken out publicly, talked or written to legislators, donated money for marriage equality – anything you’ve done to stand up for fairness – you’re helping to bring about a more just society.
Would you like to do more?

Consider the following:

**Volunteer your time:** Contact your state marriage equality organization (find your local organization at www.freedomtomarry.org) and volunteer. Attend their strategy sessions. Volunteer on projects. Attend their meetings, hearings, and rallies. Organize a fundraiser to support the work they do. Volunteer to appear on panels where you can talk about your support for marriage equality as a non-gay person.

**Learn about the battles underway:** All across the country, in every state, in many families, citizens are talking honestly and thoughtfully about whether and how to recognize a life commitment made by two women or two men in love. Americans are trying to find their way to understanding that our nation is currently a quilt of many different types of families, each of them working hard to live their lives, raise their children and contribute to the growth and security of their communities. The work is happening in statehouses, in courthouses and in average American homes in every corner of the country. Learn about the people involved, and find out how to help in your own community.

**Spread the word to other potential allies:** Research shows that many Americans lack strong feelings about marriage equality either way. They do not get engaged because they lack a personal connection to the issue. You can give them that personal connection by explaining to them why fairness demands that same-sex couples have the freedom to marry. Let your non-gay friends and acquaintances know that you’re involved and ask them to become involved. Give them some specific ideas about particular projects where their help is needed, and provide them with materials and information that will make it easy for them to join in.

**Show your support on the job:** At your workplace, put up flyers or cards near your desk or workstation that express your support for marriage equality – these can generate terrific conversations that give you a chance to explain to others why this issue is important to you.

**Wear symbols of your support:** Some organizations have created great looking lapel pins and rubber bracelets to showcase your support of marriage equality (modeled on Lance Armstrong’s “Live Strong” bracelet) that can also be effective conversation starters.

**Work for equality on your anniversary:** If you are married, use the occasion of your anniversary (especially milestone years when you might have a party or other gathering) to raise money and awareness. You could include some remarks about marriage equality in a toast or ask friends to donate to advocacy organizations in lieu of gifts.

**If you’re engaged, get engaged:** If you are engaged to be married, consider asking your wedding guests to give money to marriage equality organizations in lieu of gifts. For a list of national and state partner organizations, consult our website at www.freedomtomarry.org. You can also offer prayers and toasts at your wedding to raise people’s consciousness about marriage equality.

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JUSTICE CANNOT BE FOR ONE SIDE ALONE, BUT MUST BE FOR BOTH.

—ELEANOR ROOSEVELT
Make a habit of inclusion: Remember to include gay couples and their families at social gatherings—weddings, parties, barbecues and dinner gatherings. Some of your straight friends might think that they don’t know anyone affected by discrimination; you can give them the chance to meet same-sex couples and their families and put a face on the issue of marriage equality.

CONCLUSION

You don’t have to reinvent the wheel to make a difference. Even if the movement for the freedom to marry is new to you—and it will likely be even more new to many of the people you speak with—there are plenty of tools and support available from both gay and non-gay groups across the country.

A list of organizations that offer a great place to start is available at www.freedomtomarry.org/partners.asp. Most of them involve both gay and non-gay Americans working together. Everyone is welcome, and everyone is needed in order to win this important fight for all families seeking equality and fairness.

Just as we all have different stories to share, we also each have different ways to share them. Don’t be afraid to start small, and grow your impact by widening your circle a little bit every day. The more personal connections each of us make, the more people we engage into this conversation and movement, the more successful we will be in insuring that all American couples and kids have access to the tools and protections needed to keep our families strong. The key is to get engaged, and stay engaged until we do what’s fair and right: end the exclusion from marriage.

Marriage matters to America—all of America. And so does what we do, each one of us, to make the world the better place we want it to be. Everyone can make a difference. The time is now.

Many thanks to Freedom to Marry Steering Committee member Jennifer Gerarda Brown for developing this resource. For more information on how to get engaged and engage your friends and neighbors, check out Straightforward: How To Mobilize Heterosexual Support For Gay Rights, written by Jennifer Gerarda Brown, and her husband, Ian Ayres.
Because marriage is a basic human right and an individual choice, RESOLVED, the State should not interfere with same-sex couples who choose to marry and share fully and equally in the rights, responsibilities and commitment of legal marriage.

I/We endorse the marriage resolution. Please feel free to include me/us as a voice in educating the public:

Signature:__________________________

Name (please print legibly):__________________________

Title: ☐ Mr. ☐ Ms. ☐ Miss. ☐ Dr. ☐ Mrs. ☐ Other:__________________________

Organization (if any):__________________________

Address:________________________________________

Address:________________________________________

City:________________________________________

State:________________________________________

Zip:________________________________________

Phone:________________________________________

Fax:________________________________________

E-mail Address:________________________________________

May we add your name and contact information to the Freedom to Marry mailing list?
☐ Yes  ☐ No

* By agreeing to endorse the statement, I understand that I am agreeing to my name being used with this statement in public releases, press materials, brochures, advertisements, and other public formats.

CUT OUT AND FAX OR MAIL IT IN TODAY!

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