Episode 88a_Mama Dragons

[00:00:00]

Hey, it's Sarah, just a quick intro about today's episode. Many of us after the election that just happened in the U S are worried about. Ourselves or our family members or friends who are LGBTQ plus, who are living in the United States. And I thought this was a good time to play an episode. That we did with mama dragons. I'm going to tell you a little bit more about them in the intro that originally ran with the episode.

But if you are worried about. Yourself, your family or your friends who are LGBTQ plus. Mama dragons would be a great. A great organization to support. So here's an episode we did back in the first year, year and a half of the podcast. With a couple of folks from the organization, mama dragons.

Sarah: Welcome to the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. I'm your host, Sarah Rosensweet, mom of three young people, Peaceful Parenting coach, and your cheerleader and guide on all things parenting. Each week, we'll cover the tools, strategies, and support you need to end the yelling and power struggles [00:01:00] and encourage your kids to listen and cooperate so that you can enjoy your family time.

Sarah: I'm happy to say we have a great relationship with our three kids. The teen years have been easy and joyful, but Not because we're special unicorns, but because my kids were raised with peaceful parenting. I've also helped so many parents just like you stop struggling and enjoy their kids again. I'm excited to be here with you today and bring you the insight and information you need to make your parenting journey a little more peaceful.

Sarah: Let's dive into this week's conversation.

Sarah: Hey y'all, welcome back to another episode of the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. Today is a very special episode. Well, I mean, I think I probably think all of them are special, but today felt extra special because today we're talking about supporting our LGBTQ kids, and that is a topic that is really close to my heart.

Sarah: Our guest today, we actually have two guests today. Our first guest is Celeste Caroline from Mama Dragons organization, which I'll tell you about in a second. And our second guest is Jen, who's a mom who's [00:02:00] involved in

working with Mama Dragons, and she is going to share her story of being part of an evangelical community and having her child come out as gay and how she handled it, how her family handled it, and how her community handled it.

Sarah: It's a really moving and interesting story and I think you're going to really learn a lot and be moved by her story and learn a lot from Celeste as I did. So Celeste is the executive director of Mama Dragons. And Mama Dragons is a non profit that supports moms and parents. And it was created by Gina Cravello when she gathered a small group of Latter day Saints mothers together as they navigated supporting their LGBTQ children in a culture that was not affirming.

Sarah: Since then, Mama Dragons has grown to become a leader in affirming parent education and offers support to more than 9, 000 members worldwide. worldwide. Okay, that made me cry a little bit. So let's dive in and meet Celeste and Jen.

Sarah: I can't wait for you all. You to hear this conversation. It [00:03:00] was so so good. Hey everyone, welcome back to another episode of the Peaceful Parenting Podcast. I have two guests with me today, which is a first. This is super exciting. I have with me Celeste Carolyn and Jen Blair from Mama Dragons and I'm going to let them introduce themselves.

Sarah: Celeste, if you could introduce yourself first and then Jen.

Celeste: Sure. So I'm Celeste Carlin. I'm the executive director of Mama Dragons, and I live just outside of Seattle in this little fishing town called Bremerton with my partner, Jamie, and our dog, Jackson Blue, and we have three adult children and five grandkiddos.

Sarah: Amazing. Yeah. And you just were telling me before we started recording that you got the kids as adults, so you get to enjoy all the benefits of having adult children and then grandkids without having had to do all the heartache of raising them.

Celeste: Yeah. There's still those moments when the kids boomerang, right?

Celeste: Yeah. For sure. But yes, the grandkids are so fun.

Sarah: Yeah. I can't, I mean, I can wait because my [00:04:00] oldest is 21, but I can't wait to have grandkids. And Jen, if you want to introduce yourself.

Jen: Yeah. My name is Jen Blair. I live in Idaho, recently moved to the big city of Idaho, but spent a long time raising kids in a more rural area.

Jen: I have two kids who are LGBTQ, and that journey started 10 years ago when I knew nothing as a super conservative individual in a super conservative and rural area. There was a pretty steep learning curve for us.

Sarah: Well, welcome both of you to the podcast. So Celeste is going to tell us a bit about Mama Dragons.

Sarah: Jen is going to share her story, her journey, which I'm really excited to hear. I'm so happy to have you both on the podcast and I'm super excited about this topic. It's one that's really close to my heart and I would love to hear more about Mama Dragons and Jen, I can't wait to hear your story.

Sarah: And also I want to share with our listeners is where we're going to be going today is best practices for raising kids when we don't know yet what their sexual orientation [00:05:00] is, and also best practices for when we do know that we have an LGBTQ kid or when we suspect that we have an LGBTQ. TQ kid. I was talking to a girlfriend of mine the other day who told me that her daughter had just come out as lesbian, who's 15, and she said, honestly, though, I knew when she was four, so she was happy that her daughter had told her, and the whole family was really supportive, and that was nice to hear, but I think some people do really have a sense of what their kids sexual orientation is and some people have no idea and they're very surprised when their kids come out to them.

Sarah: So either way, I think this is going to be a really valuable conversation for parents. So maybe Celeste, you could just tell us a bit about Mama Dragons.

Celeste: Absolutely. So, Mama Dragons is really unique as it, it started in Utah by a group of women who organically came together when a woman was trying to create a GSA.

Sarah: Can you say what that is for people who don't know?

Celeste: Yeah Gay Straight Alliance. Gay Straight [00:06:00] Alliance. It's so strange because I live in Seattle and these things are almost like organic. They're like, Oh yes. So she was starting a Gay Straight Alliance and she really wanted to seek support because she wasn't unsure of how to support some of these kiddos.

Celeste: So she, she gathered this group of women that she knew that through media or blogs or some other source that had LGBTQ kids. And as soon as she brought them together, things shifted from her getting support from me. Facebook And soon, like this little message thread kept growing and people were being added and being like, Oh, I know another person that this might help.

Celeste: And in a really short period of time, this group had to change into a Facebook group because it was so big. And then it just rapidly grew. So That was back then. Now, we are over 9, 000 moms. We have dedicated support groups. We're a 501c3. We have a ton of education programs and really our root of what we are is we support parents and mothers to become affirming of their [00:07:00] LGBTQ children so that they can therefore go and affirm and celebrate their kids out in the world.

Celeste: And because we started in these religious roots, which in Utah is Mormonism, but now our group is very diverse, people that are Mormon or LDS, we have folks who are Christian, come from evangelical faiths, we have people who are Jewish, the story is all the same, that they're coming from these spaces of feeling like they didn't have the resources or they didn't have the knowledge to even Transcribed Really know how to get there.

Celeste: So we take people from a place of like, maybe just not knowing what to do and then guiding them through, which is, it's unique than other spaces where they just gather people who are already allies.

Sarah: Well and from what I understand, I think the Mormon church and some evangelical churches have historically been fairly hostile to LGBTQ people, right?

Sarah: So this is, to me, this is even more of a radical organization because you're, it sounds like your roots at least have been within populations [00:08:00] where their communities were, I would say less than supportive of somebody who had, who was LGBTQ or had LGBTQ kids.

Celeste: Absolutely. And it's, I mean, you'll hear in Jen's story, but it's really fascinating seeing moms know there's this attachment and love that you have for your child.

Celeste: And when you have an organization or a church or a culture that says, Hey, your child is less than, often there's something that happens in a mom that tends to question of like, that doesn't feel right. Like my intuition says. That this

little kid that I've seen grown my entire life isn't broken. And when that starts to happen, they no longer have a support system to process that with their family.

Celeste: Generally are the same culture or religion that they come from their. support system around them just doesn't have the means to support them through that. And so they end up searching for something outside of themselves. So I

Sarah: was listening to, I don't probably a podcast with Dan Savage, who I know because he's a Seattle guy who's a great activist.

Sarah: And [00:09:00] he told the story of when he came out to his mom, who was Catholic, he was really worried about what she was going to say. And she, thought about it. And she said, well, maybe this is one thing the priests are wrong about. So she was able to reconcile her religion by thinking, well maybe they could be wrong about this one thing.

Celeste: Yeah. And as we know too, that when people are trying to understand something about diversity or something that they don't know about themselves, that it's sometimes difficult to find a space where you can ask more moral questions that you feel like sometimes you'll be attacked or that that you're like, I feel too much shame to ask this question.

Celeste: And what I love about Mama Dragons is in the support groups, is there space for that to be like, I'm having a really hard time with pronouns or my kid changed their mind again? And is this real? How do I know this is real? And those process of asking questions allows for space to be educated, allows space for thoughts and to be challenged in a really soft kind of guiding way.

Celeste: And [00:10:00] that's how we look at it, is that we're like, almost like raising these parents to be like, this is how you affirm, this is how you do it softly, and we guide them along this path.

Sarah: I love that. And I love how you talked about it's a community that you can ask questions without shame and be who you are without shame.

Sarah: And that's something that we talk about so much in Peaceful Parenting is that how driven so many of our triggers are by shame. And so many of our bad choices that we make are really driven by that feeling of shame. It's such a powerful and a powerful force in a bad way. And I love that you've just really identified that's.

Sarah: That's something that's important to, to talk about. Yeah. Well, I'd love to hear your story, Jen. So the beginnings of my story are probably the most relevant to the organization about 10 years ago, my oldest son he had been struggling and we knew that he was struggling. But we were naive.

Jen: How old was, sorry, how old was he at the time? 16.

Sarah: [00:11:00] Okay.

Jen: And he had been saying lots of things all the time, like, I don't want to kill myself, but I wish I had never been born. Or it would be nice if I could go to sleep. And in our, naive innocence, I guess. We chalked it up to the idea of teenage angst that you always hear about, right?

Jen: Like, oh, those darn teenagers. This is what they're like. This is what people mean when they say it's hard parenting a teenager. And so we stayed really close to him. We were homeschooling at the time. So I was with him all the time and we were in a pretty sheltered situation. Where we, like, we didn't even have TV at our house.

Jen: We could watch videos, educational videos, but we were homeschooling. And so I knew the kid really well, and I knew that something was off, but I was just waiting for him to outgrow it until one day I was doing that, like getting ready for the starter morning routine and just had that maternal instinct, like it's time to go have a talk with him.

Jen: Which we had the talk a lot and it was always about video games. Don't spend so much time on video games. So that's what I was anticipating. So I went [00:12:00] up to his room and I sat down on the floor and I said, How we doing? Let's let's chat. Tell me where you're at. Help me understand.

Jen: And he got really And he started pacing around the floor and I was like, I feel like you have something on the tip of your tongue that you want to talk to me about, or that you want me to know, but you're having a hard time saying it. And he just kept pacing and his eyes were all full of tears.

Jen: And I understand now you're not supposed, not necessarily supposed to ask. But in that moment, I looked at him and honestly, on some level, I must have known, but I had never had the conscious thought before that he might be gay. So when the words came out of my mouth, Are you gay? My first instinct inside my heart was how, why would you ask him that?

Jen: That's such a horrible question. Why would, like, why would you accuse, like, accuse him of that kind of a thing? But I looked at him and the way that he froze and stared at me and just kept staring. And so I sat there for a minute and I said, this isn't the kind of thing I can guess, sweetheart. If this is something we need to talk about, [00:13:00] you're going to have to tell me.

Jen: And so he he was on his knees. He crawled over to his desk and scribbled out the word. Yes. on a piece of paper, but it was barely legible. And he turned around and showed it to me. He couldn't, he could barely breathe. He was so scared to talk to me. And so I got up from the floor. He was on his knees and he's tall.

Jen: So it was good. I caught up and went over to him and I gave him a big hug. And I said, I don't know anything about this. I have no idea what we're supposed to do or what we're going to do, but we're going to do it together. We're going to figure it out together and work through it together. And then we spent the next two hours I laid back on the floor and he laid his head on my lap and I just played with his hair.

Jen: And I learned so many important things during those few minutes because his body, this is like the most vivid memory for me, but his body kept shaking, like when you go to the gym and you work out and then your muscles are spasming because they're so exhausted. And he laid there and his body shook like that.

Jen: And I realized that this secret he had been carrying, I didn't know any details at this point, but I realized that this [00:14:00] secret and the idea of telling me was very physical for him and he had been carrying it for an amount of time. enough to influence his body and the way that his body processed it.

Sarah: Do you know that shaking is actually what a lot of animals do when they're coming out of fight, flight, or freeze?

Sarah: Like when they're under like a deadly attack and they survive, and they shake to clear their bodies of the, all of the stress chemicals and hormones that were produced during the fight, flight, or freeze. So that's It's super interesting. It's like he was coming out of his own fight, flight, or freeze after he told you the relief was so great.

Jen: Yeah. In my head, I was, as we sat there for two hours and he cried and I cried and we just stayed there. I knew that I didn't know anything, but I was trying to go through in my head what I did know. Like, hold on to like

something that would be grounding, what I did know. And I realized that everything I thought I knew about being gay or being in that realm had to be wrong.

Jen: Because I knew this kid more than I knew those things. And so all of the [00:15:00] things that I thought I knew were suddenly wrong. And I didn't know where to go or how to find answers to these things, and it was 10 years ago. So there were way less options out there. But I needed to find some people who could talk to me, because I was a beginner.

Jen: I knew Ellen DeGeneres and Anderson Cooper. That was it. Like, not on any sort of a personal level. So we had to get, we had to get busy and do some learning, because all of a sudden I had a 16 year old that I had to parent, and I did not know how to parent him.

Sarah: Did he know any other gay kids?

Jen: No.

Sarah: No. So he felt super alone.

Jen: He didn't know any. It took him over a year, even after coming out to us before he felt comfortable telling his friends.

Sarah: Wow. And so when you say everything that you thought you knew was wrong, do you mean that you'd been taught that it was like wrong to be gay or that gay people were bad or something like that?

Jen: Yeah. Like in my head, I had all these weird misconceptions. Like it was some sort of sexual addiction, like, because it was perverse. Or something like that, people would become addicted to it, and then they would put their [00:16:00] identity around it. I had all these weird visions in my head of like, politicians in airport bathrooms getting caught, and parades with half naked people walking down the street.

Jen: I had no concept of like the gay person who's a banker, and just goes to work and comes home and does the laundry. Yeah, or your

Sarah: teacher,

Jen: or your

Sarah: policeman, or whatever.

Jen: Yeah, no concept of that at all. I just had these weird news blips and then everything I had been taught religiously about like the eternal implications of clinging to an identity like this, but I knew he wasn't addicted to anything.

Jen: He had never held hands or kissed anyone at that point, like boy or girl. And he was nerdy and he was like the best brother in the history of the universe. We homeschooled and he had these three little sisters and they would play hide and seek all day and he would run around and give him piggyback rides.

Jen: So this idea of like a rebellious. Pervert seeking evil or whatever. It was just so like the antithesis of who this kid actually was.

Sarah: Yeah. Well, I mean, I think that when when I was younger, my, [00:17:00] I hope they don't mind me saying this on a podcast, but my parents are both gay. And when my mom came out when I was in high school, it was the 80s and nobody I didn't really know anyone who was gay.

Sarah: I mean, I'm sure I did, but I didn't know that they were gay. Right. And I felt like, Okay. there was so much prejudice. I felt like I had to hide that, right? And I never dreamed that five years later, we'd have like banks with like the pride flag. And I really think that it's, and that gay marriage would be legal and all of the, all of those things.

Sarah: And I really think that it's because When people did finally start coming out it was your teacher or your just like you're saying, like people didn't know that there were all these quote, regular people who are gay. And I was like, Oh, wait, these people that I already know and love, they're gay.

Sarah: Right. So I think that is, I mean, that's my personal opinion about why we've come to. such a large degree of acceptance so quickly, because it really is quite remarkable when I stop and think about where we've come since [00:18:00] 1985.

Celeste: I would agree, and I'm gonna put an and on top of that, is that data shows that we know that a third of kids in the U.

Celeste: S. right now don't have affirming parents. Yeah, and so we've come a long ways. But when we look at the rates of suicide with LGBTQ kiddos and self harm and depression and anxiety, they are directly connected to non affirming parent experience. And so we've, we have come a long way, but not

far enough and things like the pandemic and social media have allowed more space for more kids than ever to come out.

Celeste: But that doesn't mean they're coming out to affirming families. Thank you for

Sarah: that reminder, Celeste, because I forget sometimes that I live in an urban bubble. So what, how can we help those kids who are coming from non affirming families?

Celeste: It only takes one affirming adult in a kiddo's life to really change things for them.

Celeste: And so there's places around kids that have influence. So either it's you're a parent of a kid that you see out [00:19:00] there, you're a teacher, you're a doctor, you're a therapist, all those places have influence over that kid's life. And it takes all people, right? Like, so if you see that there's a kid that maybe has a non affirming parent, that there's moments that You can affirm their identity, use their pronouns, you can give hope for that kid, and you can influence those parents in a loving, kind way.

Celeste: Literally, it takes like a group of people, their whole system, to make a difference. Like as Jen was talking about her story of having this kiddo in a small town in Idaho, like it can't just be her that's trying to build up this kid. It has to be more than that. If she's the only one in his corner, he's still gonna suffer from this culture that's around him.

Celeste: And so I look at it as if people are listening to this podcast that are future parents or they're on the outside looking in as allies of how do we personally move from that space of like shame of seeing things happen that we feel uncomfortable with to almost like using [00:20:00] that guilt is like a motivator to be like, now do something, do anything that you can that's within your range to show that child or adult that they are loved.

Celeste: Yeah,

Sarah: and sometimes it can be small, really small things too, like I, parents in my membership was talking about how she was driving her 13 year old son and his friends to a hockey practice or something like that, and one of the kids said the F word. And she stopped the car and she turned around and she said I won't tolerate anyone talking about other people like that.

Sarah: That's not okay. It's not cool. And I thought that was really great that she did that. And that one of those kids in the car could have been gay. And not out to his friends, but she had just shown that she could be that affirming adult for him, right? Like a safe person.

Celeste: And I know, like, For example, Jen here on the call has done awesome things for community and kiddos.

Celeste: We volunteer together with youth programs and done other things throughout the year. Our career together and it's amazing to see the difference of [00:21:00] just having a few affirming people around these kiddos What it does to their development.

Sarah: Yeah, and I think that's a good sort of segue into parenting practices and I it's funny you mentioned Anderson Cooper Jen because I heard him on the radio about Maybe about 10 years ago, talking about when he was growing up, his mom, and this is in the seventies, would refer to this gay couple of friends of theirs as a married couple.

Sarah: And of course it gay marriage was not legal in the seventies, but he said when she used language like that, and he, as a little boy, he knew he was gay, but he knew that it was not legal. Oh, I, when I tell my mom that I'm gay, she'll be okay with it because of how she had talked about other people in her life, right?

Sarah: So even if we don't know what our child's sexual orientation is, the way that we talk about different kinds of people in our homes matter. And that's what I took away from that, right? So we can't assume but the way that we treat people and the way that we talk about people really [00:22:00] gives messages to our kids.

Sarah: Is my mom or dad going to be supportive of me or not?

Jen: I feel like we were super lucky in the fact that it was long enough ago that it was a non issue. So we had the experience, I guess, that we hadn't said a lot of negative things. We hadn't participated in any legal campaigns. I know lots of parents, when their child comes out to them, they have participated in Prop 8 against their child, or they've said things at home.

Jen: We were really lucky that we hadn't ever said anything negative. It was just a non issue for us. It was not on our radar. We didn't know any people. There was like, it was like this make believe other world. So we hadn't said any

positive things, which I desperately wish we had, but we hadn't said any negative things either.

Jen: So we had like a halfway starting point where we only had to get rid of the messages from the community and that we were hearing from our church. And thankfully we didn't. I'm sure we said unfortunate things that we regret, but it wasn't, thankfully we hadn't done anything negative. And I consistently hope that parents will [00:23:00] consider that when they're talking about politics or talking about laws or talking about those sorts of things, that they might actually be talking about their own kids.

Jen: And they just don't realize it yet.

Sarah: Yeah, and same with we're talking a lot about gay kids, but same with trans kids, or non binary kids, right? Especially because it's in the news so much these days. I think that's a really great piece of advice. Is there anything else that you would add that you wish you had known that you were you didn't know you were raising a gay kid, but looking back, you wish you had known, and maybe that would help some other people?

Jen: Since I knew nothing, I wish I would have known anything. The interesting thing is our oldest comes out, came out as gay. Our youngest, who's 17 now, we've got some changing labels, so I have a hard time putting a specific label on it in any sort of permanent situation. But definitely gender, non confirming, we're using they them pronouns.

Jen: And the difference between the turmoil we went through the first one, now we say he was only gay, but we didn't know anything compared to 10 years later when this younger sibling comes [00:24:00] out and when they come out, we're able to say it was a whole different parenting experience. We had changed everything about the way we parented by then.

Jen: And man, I wish that we had been that prepared when the first came out. I wish that we had been exposed to some ideas outside of our own. Culture and background. We had, we were so isolated, so insulated that we knew like, like, what do I wish I knew anything? I wish I'd thrown anything at all before I started because the difference when the last one started talking to us, when they were about 12 was phenomenal in the way that we responded and handled it and worked through all of that.

Jen: Knowledge is power. I wish that we could get parents to consider that this might be them or it might be their kids peers. And it's worth learning about.

Sarah: That's such good advice. So don't as I was suggesting, don't assume you're raising all straight kids and What a difference it was for your youngest child when they're questioning and they didn't go through that Four years or whatever that your oldest child [00:25:00] went through of what you were thinking was just teen angst, right?

Sarah: So your youngest must be very grateful to their brother for paving the way and making life a little bit easier for them. Absolutely Yeah, so don't assume. Watch the things that you say because you or the actions that you take because you might be talking about your kid and educate yourself about different possibilities.

Sarah: I think those are some really great takeaways. What about for parents who do know who's maybe whose child has come out to them as LGBTQ and what are some Things that you've learned over your years of working with Mama Dragons that are really helpful for parents who do have gay kids.

Jen: I'll speak first to the ones who are surprised or shocked.

Jen: Like, take a deep breath. It's gonna be okay, and your most important job is, the same most important job of their entire lives of parenting, is love the kid you have, and then you can figure out the rest of it as you go. But take this [00:26:00] kid in their wholeness and their completeness and everything awesome about them that you love and just love them and then you can learn the rest of it as you go along.

Sarah: That's so great. I heard somebody once say that if your kid comes out to you, you shouldn't say, well, I love you anyway, or I love you no matter what, because that kind of it's a little bit othering maybe, but just love them. Let's just leave it at that. Just love them. Anything else that either of you want to add for maybe somebody who's not so shocked.

Sarah: Is there anything or even more for the shocked parents?

Celeste: Yeah, I think that support is essential for parents, is that parenting is hard in general, and parenting LGBTQ kid is even harder when we live in a world that isn't completely affirming. That we have subcultures everywhere that are saying that your kids are broken or don't deserve the same privileges as other kids.

Celeste: And even if your house is affirming, those outside [00:27:00] pressures. Add a stigma and a marginalization that hurts them. And so parents

need more than just them. They need an outside support system and I recommend them finding one. When we've gathered research about Mama Dragons, we've found that after their kid comes out, it takes them three to six months to actually go somewhere to get support.

Celeste: And that's a big gap, especially when you think about this kiddo that tells this vulnerable truth for parents to actually go and like seek some support. I think the other thing I've watched is that. Often parents will rely too heavily. On their kiddos to educate them. And what we need parents to do is educate themselves and then go back to their kid and say, Hey, this is something I've learned.

Celeste: Does this sound like what it means to you? There's a responsibility of parents to do their own work and then check back in with their kiddos.

Sarah: We'll put some resources in the show notes. for parents. I'll ask you to send me some and we'll put those in the show notes. Jen, going back to something you said [00:28:00] before when you said you asked your son if he was gay and then you said you later learned you're not supposed to ask that.

Sarah: Can you talk about that a little bit?

Jen: Yeah, absolutely. And there's lots of instances where parents ask and it's fine, but there is something to be said. Often the kids aren't ready to come out. And so first of all, they're trying really hard to be closeted. They're trying really hard to hide secrets. And if you ask them, what you're saying is your efforts to hide this about yourself are really unsuccessful.

Jen: We can all tell, we can all see it, which adds this layer of insecurity. But a lot of times with teens, at least I've noticed this in rural Idaho. And as we've done different activities with kids, if the kids aren't ready to come out yet, they will lie to you. Just instinctually, right? They're all day, every day going I'm not trans, I'm not trans, I'm not trans, I'm not trans, I'm not trans, and so then the parent asks, hey, is there a chance that you're LGBTQ and we need to talk about that?

Jen: And the instinct comes out immediately, no, I'm not. And so then you've created this situation where the [00:29:00] child has created a lie that they have to defend for a while, and then they have to undo a lie in addition to coming out. So if you can provide opportunities, I wish that I had known anything about using gender neutral language instead of constantly talking about your wife as he was growing up, probably starting when he was a little teeny kid, one day

you and your wife, you and your wife, if I had used more gender neutral language all along, you and your partner, or when you're dating someone, one.

Jen: Or one day when you get married, we'll love you both. Like instead of using these really gendered words all the time, I think it could have changed the entire culture of our home by providing it as an option for him. That space was available instead of, it just didn't, it didn't exist. We talked so much about his wife his future wife and children.

Sarah: Well, yeah, going back to that, not assuming, right, that your kid is straight. And also somebody else told me this, that if you do suspect that your child is LGBTQ, but and you're not going to ask them [00:30:00] because you, I love the reasons that you just gave. Drop lots of hints. You're open to the idea of them, not maybe them specifically, but like have conversations in your house where you talk about news things or something that show that you would have a positive reaction if they were to come out to you.

Jen: Yeah, absolutely. But even just, and you, I think you can be super direct without questioning them and saying whoever you love, whoever you are, we love you for yourself. Nothing will ever change that very directly and specifically. To all the kids and just it's a matter of normal conversation.

Sarah: That's fantastic. Is there anything that you wish I'd asked you, either of you, that you think it's important for parents of LGBTQ kids, whether they know it or not, that you would like people to know? I

Celeste: think there's just a lot of misinformation out there right now. About things being a trend or that the kids are learning this on tick tock.

Celeste: And that's why it's happening. [00:31:00] Like if I hope parents, when they hear that stuff, actually go read research, like academic research, that's like, what is actually happening? And what they show is that our world is just allowing people who have been terrified to come out to have a little more space that we're challenging gender in a way that should have happened hundreds and hundreds of years ago to say, it doesn't matter if I'm wearing pants or a dress.

Celeste: Like, why are we still fixated on this? Right? Like, and our kids are smarter than ever of saying, like, Hey, we can accept each other. Why can't you just accept us? And I just, I love that concept of like, that our kids are smarter than we are, that they have this like radical acceptance they have this ability to explore their identity that we were probably terrified to do and empower them to do that.

Celeste: Like empower them to be like, there's room to try on lots of different things. Like, that's what our adolescence in college is all about, right? Like, it's to explore that identity.

Sarah: That's beautiful. Why do [00:32:00] you think people are so threatened by that? Well, I think that's what the backlash is that's going on, right?

Sarah: About the the quote trend.

Celeste: Yeah. I think it, it really challenges a lot of patriarchal beliefs, like this whole concept that our world is based upon, these gender roles. That men do this, women do this, certain groups have power, less groups have power. That's beautiful. And even though we probably don't really realize what's going on, but we're challenging that structure of saying like, Hey, we're going to throw that out the window and say that it doesn't matter if you are a stay at home parent or you're in the workforce, one person doesn't have more value than the other, or if you have kids or don't have kids, or if you're married or unmarried, or if I wear a dress or I wear pants, like none of it matters.

Celeste: And we're going to throw that all out the window. And I think it terrifies people because what's their value if we throw that out the window?

Sarah: Well, especially for the groups that have had all the power up [00:33:00] until now.

Jen: I also think in politics, we're seeing a lot of intentional creation of fear and intentional creation of misinformation for those same people we're talking about to maintain power.

Jen: So here locally, we do a lot of general education, But the local legislature benefits. By creating animosity towards the queer community in general, they benefit, they get more votes, they get more power and they get to spend more time in office. So if they can create this scary demographic of drag queens that are out to get your children, then they get votes and they, that's how they win.

Jen: Or if they talk about mutilating children's bodies and create all these weird, Lies about genital surgery on eight year olds, or things that just don't exist. They get votes and it keeps 'em in power. So it's not just misinformation that already exists, but there's actually people intentionally feeding this misinformation in order to maintain that sense of power that we talked about.

Sarah: Yeah I think that's really [00:34:00] a good thing to point out because there is such a crazy amount of misinformation and hopefully we'll be the , we'll be a little tiny drop in the bucket against that .

Celeste: I mean, you put a group of mothers on something. Mothers that are passionate and care and potentially come from conservative religious environments.

Celeste: And they are like, they're unstoppable. So I think that like, also understanding that our kind of our combined efforts have a lot of value. I think of the things that we've been able to accomplish as an organization and I'm just, it's dumbfounding what mothers are willing to do.

Sarah: That's amazing.

Sarah: Do you think it's having an effect on the higher, the top levels of the organization

Celeste: of religions? I think so. I think it's scary for them. I think that they're trying to figure out how to not lose all their membership because that's what's happening in these conservative environments that these kiddos are saying, this doesn't feel right.

Celeste: You're like outing and like othering all these people and we're not [00:35:00] going to participate in it. And churches exist because of their membership. And when that all flees, they have to do something different. Good. All right.

Jen: With my own religious background, I can see. monumental change just in the past 10 years.

Jen: When I started, when my son came out, I turned first to my church and I was going to like religious bookstores trying to find resources and it didn't exist. There was nothing there in the past 10 years, there's in these same bookstores, an entire section. It's still very faith affirming and from the church's angle, but an entire bookshelf of options on this subject for parenting.

Jen: There's, they've created an entire website on this topic. Wow. And none of this existed at all 10 years ago. I had nowhere to go and no one to ask and like, no, and now there's, it's still not probably where we would want it to be as far as the material itself, but it exists.

Sarah: It's hopeful.

Jen: Yeah. It existed and it didn't 10 years ago.

Celeste: Well, and that's going to save some kids lives. [00:36:00] And I think too, that when you're around people that are part of the LGBTQ community, it's really hard not to love them, honestly. Like, yeah. And so when you think about parenting and that concept of being like, someday you might have an LGBTQ kid, maybe you should have some queer friends like that.

Celeste: Just having some queer people in your life, like shows that you're affirming and it gives this additional support system. Like I think of so many of people who have come out to me because I'm part of their system, whether it's family or friends or that I'm the safe person because I'm queer. But that dynamic allows safety.

Celeste: It's that one affirming adult that I'm like, well, I may not be ready to tell mom, but I'm going to tell Celeste.

Sarah: I love that you've been able to be there for those kids. I imagine that happens to you too, Jen.

Jen: Yeah, we have lots of people who come out first time because they watch, these teenagers watch me respond to my own children, and so they're expecting a similar response for them.

Jen: It's almost like a practice run, [00:37:00] to be like, practice saying the words out loud to a, like, a maternal figure. Who's got like all of the maternal vibes and stuff. It's like a practice. Like, okay, how could it possibly, what might this possibly look like with my mom? Kind of practice and warm up. Yeah, we hear it all the time.

Sarah: That's beautiful. Well, thank you both so much for coming on. It's been a really great conversation. I know it's going to help a lot of parents and kids. Before I let you go, I'm going to ask, I'm first going to ask you, Jen. If you could go back to your younger parent self, what advice would you give yourself?

Jen: At the time, my younger mom self was trying desperately to create perfect children that could fit into the world. I knew what the world wanted and demanded, and I was working really hard to create children who could thrive and survive in that environment. And if I could go back and start over, I would tell myself that I did not need to change and mold these children.

Jen: I needed [00:38:00] to support these children and change the entire world so that these kids who are already just fine could survive and thrive. It wasn't them that I needed to mold and create. It was the world around them that I needed to change.

Sarah: Well, you're doing that now. Amazing. Celeste, if you, is there a piece of advice that you think parents who are just starting out on their journey should know?

Celeste: Something I learned recently that I feel silly that I was just learned is that every group, a minority group, has minority stress. And most minority groups learn to cope with that stress in their family of origin. And so if you are Black and you grew up in a Black family, you learn how to cope with that minority stress and racism from that Black family.

Celeste: LGBTQ kids often are born into heterosexual families. Or cisgender families, and they don't have that, and they need it, and families need to be aware that there's this need that they're getting [00:39:00] attacked from this world around them, and they need skills to be able to handle that attack, and families have a responsibility to build up their kids to handle that, and it's something that they've never experienced themselves.

Sarah: Right. Mine was the opposite.

Celeste: Yours was.

Sarah: Yours is

Celeste: unique.

Sarah: Yeah. Well, and then I think I, my, my dad is also gay and I think that I may be one of the last sort of generations to, to have parents who are married in a straight male, female relationship. marriage who then both later came out as gay because hopefully people will know before they marry somebody of the opposite sex that they can come out,

Celeste: right?

Celeste: You say that, Sarah, but it's still everywhere and it's rampant, especially in conservative religious environments because they were taught. that to deal with that you just get married and you have kiddos and it will go away.

Sarah: That's exactly what my dad was told when he tried to talk to someone when he was like 18.

Celeste: 40, 50 years old and [00:40:00] they're like, this just is not working. And then it hurts everyone. It hurts the family. It hurts the system. But no I wish that was a thing that stopped in the 80s.

Sarah: You're right. You're right. And again, I'm showing my bubble. I

Jen: would say for sure, I am still told regularly, my son's 26 now, and I'm still told regularly.

Jen: That if I want him to be happy, I need to make sure he knows, right, these parenting ideas at 26, I'm going to tell him that if he just will marry a woman, if he'll just have children, then he'll find true joy. Then he'll understand. And I get a lot of pressure from a lot of people to make sure that I'm teaching him this message because otherwise he's always going to be miserable.

Jen: He's always going to be lonely. He's always going to be, and I get that all the time. Oh my gosh,

Sarah: that's terrible. He can have kids.

Jen: Absolutely he can if he wants to. He's got to work

Sarah: a little harder than a male female couple might have to, but he can have

Jen: kids. And he might have 10 cats instead, and that's fantastic if that's what he chooses.

Celeste: Yeah,

Jen: totally. Or he may be ace and [00:41:00] not want to partner at all. Yeah. Right? Like, or want to partner and do things differently. I just, I think there's just so many roads. It's just I just am so excited for youth today to be like, go figure out like this like gray area of life. Like let's get away from the binary.

Celeste: It's binary. Let's throw it out the window.

Sarah: Yes. Bye bye, binary.

Jen: Absolutely.

Sarah: All right. Well, that's a good place to end. Tell us a little bit more about where we can find out more about Mama Dragons. And as I mentioned, we'll, you will put some stuff in the show notes, but just give a shout out.

Celeste: So your first step to get involved as a parent is drop by mamadragons. org. Right on our landing page, you're going to find a bunch of resources. One of them is called Parachute, and it's an e learning program for parents. And it, there's multiple courses on how to start affirming. Start affirming parenting.

Celeste: We also offer suicide prevention classes and then support groups and you can find access to all those at mamadragons. org

Sarah: Great, and I also just want to say like we've talked around it I think that [00:42:00] it's important for parents to know that if they aren't affirming then their kid has what's what are the statistics on suicide?

Celeste: there's a Essentially, like, it depends on the state, but essentially you're at, what, four times the risk, depending on what type of letter you have in the LGBTQ alphabet, and it goes even higher for trans kids, and it goes even higher if you are a minority on top of that.

Sarah: Yeah, so that's really serious.

Sarah: And if anyone's made it this far and isn't taking us seriously so far, hopefully that will make them have another think about this, because it's literally a matter of life and death for kids, how their parents react to them.

Celeste: It is. So and we're grateful for anyone who's just. willing to just step in and say, I don't know about this.

Celeste: And I just trying to figure this out.

Sarah: Yeah. You have a shame free environment for parents to learn. So thank you for that. Bye. Thanks for listening to this week's episode. I hope you found this conversation insightful and exactly what [00:43:00] you needed in this moment. Be sure to subscribe to the show on your favorite podcast platform and leave us a rating and review on Apple podcasts.

Sarah: Remember that I'm rooting for you. I see you out there showing up for your kids and doing the best you can. Sending hugs over the airwaves today. Hang in there. You've got this.