



QUEER CAFÉ LGBTQ INFORMATION NETWORK

Coming Out

The term “coming out” refers to the life-long process in developing a positive identity as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender person. It is not something that just happens one day.

It is an ongoing process. First, the person must accept him/herself, and be somewhat comfortable with the fact he/she is gay.



Next, the person usually tells his/her closest friend or group of friends to “test” how comfortable they might be with disclosure. Another step is finding a partner or starting to date someone. The most difficult step, in many cases, is when the person decides to tell his/her parents, other family members, or employer.

This process is a long and difficult struggle for many people since they have to confront many opposing ideas and homophobic attitudes. Many first need to struggle with misinformation and stereotypes that are taught them while growing up. After years of painful work to develop a positive identity and attitude, many will then decide whom to tell that they are gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender.

Closeted – Individual who is not open to themselves or others about their sexuality or gender identity. This may be by choice and/or for other reasons such as fear for one’s safety, peer or family rejection or disapproval and/or loss of housing or job. Also known as being “in the closet.” When someone chooses to break this silence they “come out” of the closet.

Coming Out – Process by which one accepts and/or comes to identify one’s own sexuality or gender identity (to “come out” to oneself). Process by which one shares one’s sexuality or gender identity with others (to “come out” to friends, family, co-workers).

Outing/Outed – Involuntary, unwanted, or unexpected disclosure of a person’s sexual orientation or gender identity status.

“When I was fully in the closet, I always felt the need to make sure there was no possible way no one would ever find out. That’s why I’m happy I came out, even if it’s just a few people.”

Preparing Yourself to Come Out

Have a serious talk with yourself. Clarify specifically what you hope will happen as a result of disclosure and what you expect will really happen.

Select the particular person to whom you wish to disclose. Tell the person that you want to share something important, that you want to have a serious personal conversation.



Select a time and a place. Avoid situations that may result in a lack of time or privacy.

Keep your disclosure clean. Don’t clutter it up with attempts to punish, cause guilt or gain sympathy. Talk about yourself, your feelings and your experiences.

Allow time for surprise reactions from the other person. Be ready to identify learning resources that are available to the person. He or she will need time to digest your disclosure and ingest a new understanding.

Support and Affirmation

An important element of the coming out process is the setting up of support system. Participating in an LGBTQ support group can help prepare you for disclosure to significant others in your life. It can also provide you with support and understanding during and after the disclosure.

Coming out in our society is an endless process and being proud of being LGBTQ requires constant affirmation of self.

Being "In the Closet" has been described as hiding your true self, denying your real identity, and suppressing your authenticity. To be closeted about your sexual orientation is to restrain yourself from revealing an important aspect of your nature.

What does it feel like to be closeted? It has been described as exhausting, stressful, a fulltime job, and keeping yourself in check at all times. It takes a lot of time and energy to constantly hide certain aspects of your self.

When Someone Comes Out to You

Don't judge. Regardless of your own personal or moral belief about LGBTQ people, keep in mind that the person has made himself/herself vulnerable.

Simply listen to the person. The most important thing you can do is to listen. Being LGBTQ isn't a problem that needs solving or something that becomes easy to deal with given just the right resource. LGBTQ identities are part of who people are. When you listen to people tell you about their identities, you learn more about who that person is.



Acknowledge them. Let them know that you heard what they said and ask open-ended questions to show that you are interested and care.

Recognize the trust. If someone voluntarily comes out to you he/she is putting a lot of

trust in you and has used a lot of courage. Acknowledge that courage and trust.

Match their words. Remember that this is about how they identify. It is important to use the same language that they use.

Mirror their emotions. You should be mindful of their emotions concerning coming out. If the person is happy, don't talk about how difficult it must be.



Don't let sex be your guide. Don't assume, just because someone has had a same-sex sexual encounter, that the person identifies as gay. Also don't assume, just because someone identifies as gay, that the person has had a same-sex sexual encounter.

Maintain contact. Let the person know that they are still important to you. You don't need to change the way you interact or how often you see the person in the future.

Keep confidentiality. LGBTQ people face many forms of discrimination and harassment in society. It is important to make sure to never share a person's identity unless it is with someone he/she has told you knows. A good rule of thumb is, "if your not sure, don't share."

Offer resources. When someone comes out to you, it is possible that he/she is already very knowledgeable about resources, but he/she also might not know of any. Share what resources you have and make an active effort to learn about new useful resources.

"Holding onto shame takes a lot of energy. And being in the closet is about being in shame; not loving ourselves and not believing that others will love us, or allow us to be part of their lives. It takes a lot of energy to maintain a counterfeit persona, to fit in when you aren't being authentic. It's a lot easier being who you really are."

"It eats away at you constantly. I feel like I am constantly watching my behavior around others. You don't really realize how much time and energy you spend trying to hide yourself on a daily basis."