

Coming Out Resource Guide

What Is Coming Out?

Coming out may refer to the process by which one accepts one's own sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status/identity (to "come out" to one's self). "Coming out" may also refer to the process by which one shares one's sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status/identity (to "come out" to friends, family, etc.). Coming out is often a continual, lifelong process and can happen at different levels (e.g. a person may be out to their friends, but not to their family).

Coming out is a life-long process for many LGBTQA+ people. Since most people are assumed to be heterosexual and gender-conforming, LGBTQA+ people often can decide if they want to disclose their identity and to whom. Yet, it is not a one-time event. It is a process of disclosing one's sexual orientation, gender identity, or status as an intersex person to a widening circle of people, beginning with one's self. The process is repeated whenever one moves into a new social group, a new school, a new job, a new professional or volunteer organization, etc.

Important Note: For many, coming out is a critical rite of passage. That said, the significance of coming out can vary from person to person. While coming out can be a good thing, in some contexts it can also be dangerous and unwise. Each person must weigh the situation and make their own decision. No one should be encouraged to come out (especially to family members) until they feel safe and ready to do so. This is another important reason to never "out" someone you know or suspect is LGBTQA+.

Looking for more resources about coming out?

I am thinking about/am in the process of coming out:

["Be Yourself: Questions and Answers for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, and Questioning Youth"](#) – PFLAG

["Sé tú mismo: Preguntas y respuestas para jóvenes gay, lesbianas, bisexuales y transgéneros"](#)
– PFLAG

["Coming Out As You!"](#) – The Trevor Project

["A Resource Guide to Coming Out"](#) – HRC

["A Resource Guide to Coming Out for African Americans"](#) – HRC

["Guía De Recursos Para Salir Del Clóset: Para Personas Lesbianas, Gais, Bisexuales y Transgéneros"](#) – HRC

["Coming Out as Transgender to Your Latino Family: Tips from a Trans Latina Counselor"](#) – Raquel Reichard

[Q&A Space: Stories and Resources for the API LGBTQ](#)

["Coming out resources"](#) – The Gender Book

["Coming Out"](#) – Gender Expansion Project

["8 Tips for Coming Out As Non-Binary"](#) – Sam Dylan Finch

["Bi the Bi: How Do You Come Out to Your Parents as Bisexual"](#) – A.J. Walkley

["8 Tips for Coming Out As Ace"](#) – Brian Langevin

["Coming Out As Intersex"](#) – Claudia Astorino

What Do I Do If Someone Comes Out To Me?

Listen. Coming out takes a lot of courage and may be the culmination of months or years of personally coming to terms with one's sexuality, gender identity, or intersex status/identity. Anyone who shares this information does so with a keen understanding of the risks involved. It may also be the case that this person simply wants to include you in their life and share something personal.

Remain Nonjudgmental. This is especially important when dealing with people who are just coming out. There is no way for the LGBTQA+ person to predict your reaction accurately. Although not always legible to heterosexual and cisgender people, we still live in a homophobic and transphobic society. If someone comes out to you, it is because they trust you! The things you say or do can have a very strong impact on this person. This exchange of intimate information should not be seen as an opportunity for you to advocate a particular way of life.

Be Willing to Learn. The burden of education should never be placed on LGBTQA+ people. It is important to do your own research about these identities independently. That said, each LGBTQA+ person has their own set of unique experiences and perspectives. Therefore, depending on the circumstances and your relationship to the person, it might be appropriate to ask some questions as you learn how to best support them. Some examples of questions are:

- Are you out to other people?
- Is there anything I can do to help support you?
- (If someone comes out as trans) What name and pronouns do you want me to use for you? Are there certain circumstances where you do not want me to use that name or those pronouns (e.g. at work, in front of family)?
- Are there any behaviors or language that I use that have made you uncomfortable and that I can change to better support you?

Looking for more resources about coming out?

I want to be supportive to a family member, friend, colleague, or community member who came out to me:

[“If Someone Comes Out to You”](#) – LGBT Center UNC- Chapel Hill

[“Our Children”](#) – PFLAG

[“Our Trans Loved Ones”](#) – PFLAG

[“Why Coming Out Has a Different Meaning for Queer/Trans People of Color”](#) – Jonathan P. Higgins

[“Religion and Coming Out Issues for African Americans”](#) – HRC

[“Family and Coming Out Issues for Latinas and Latinos”](#) – HRC

[What It’s Like To Come Out As LGBTQ In The Latino Community”](#) – Tanisha Love Ramirez

[“Coming Out Issues for Asian Pacific Americans”](#) – HRC

Avoid asking questions that are invasive or imply that there is something wrong with being LGBTQA+ (e.g. What do you think caused your homosexuality? How can you be sure that you are transgender? How can you live a normal life?)

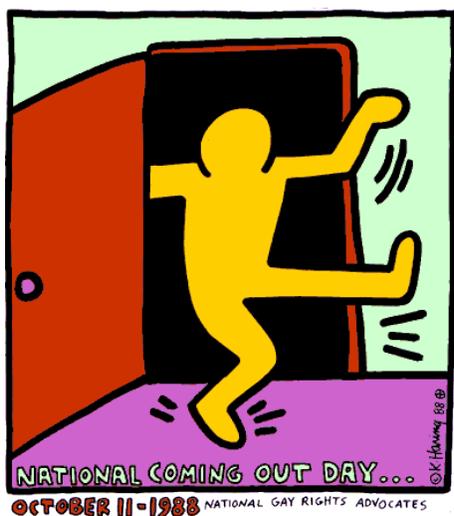
Be Supportive. Let the person know that you are there to talk with, or even just as someone to listen. LGBTQA+ people who are coming out for the first time may not be aware of resources available to them, or they may not feel comfortable approaching other people about the subject. You do not need to be an expert on the subject – sometimes just having an open-minded person to listen helps!

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Don't Ignore It. When a person chooses to come out to you, it may be because they are tired of living in secrecy. Being LGBTQA+ and not being able to tell anyone can be very frustrating and isolating. Do not pretend as though your conversation about their identity never happened. Genuinely affirming a person's identity and experiences is a big part of demonstrating respect for them.

Don't Hyper-Focus On Their LGBTQA+ Identity. While it is important to acknowledge and validate a person's LGBTQA+ identity, it is not necessary to let this topic dominate all of your interactions with this person. Allow the LGBTQA+ person to guide the extent to which you discuss this part of their identity. For example, if they begin talking about dating with you, make sure to affirm their romantic and sexual orientations. Treat them as a whole person – not just as their LGBTQA+ identity.

Be Honest and Open. It's okay to admit that you do not know everything, or even anything, about being LGBTQA+. In some cases, this lack of knowledge might contribute to discomfort about the subject, or even about this aspect of the person's identity. What's important is expressing to the person that you will take the time to educate yourself and to follow through with that promise. If someone who has come out to you wants detailed information or is in need of more in-depth counseling than you can provide, it is perfectly acceptable to suggest that they speak with someone more educated on the topic.



How Do I Support Someone Who Comes Out To Me As Transgender?

Ask About Their Name and Pronouns. Respecting a transgender person's chosen name and pronouns is a vital part of respecting their identity. If someone comes out to you as transgender, ask what name and what pronouns (e.g. she/her/hers; he/him/his; they/them/theirs; xe/hir/hirs) they would like you to use for them. Because a trans person might not be out everywhere and to everyone, you can also ask if there are any situations (e.g. at work, in front of family) that the person might want you to use a different name or set of pronouns for them.

Once you know someone's name and pronouns, use them consistently. Mistakes happen, and you might forget or slip up once in a while. That said, using a person's name and pronouns is vitally important not only in affirming their identity, but also in not threatening their safety. Do not refer to someone's legal name as their "real name" (their real name is the one that they have chosen for themselves). Never use the word "it" to refer to someone who is transgender, as it is incredibly insulting, dehumanizing, and disrespectful. If you are unsure of a person's pronouns, it is best to use the pronouns "they" to refer to them.

Do Not "Out" Someone. Do not tell others that someone is transgender without their permission, and do not assume that everyone knows that the person is transgender. The decision to share someone's gender identity (and sexual/romantic orientation or intersex status/identity) should always be left to the person themselves. Because of the high levels of transphobia in our society, the impacts of "outing" a trans person can go beyond causing discomfort or pain. It can also put their personal safety and livelihood at risk.

Do Not Consider Their Identity A "Fad." Because trans identity is being discussed more in the media than it has historically, some people believe that the rising number of "out" trans people just means that these people are following a fad.

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