

Coming out: A process

Have you come to a point on your journey where you've come to terms with your sexual identity and are ready to share? If so, you might be ready to come out.

Coming out involves owning your sexual identity with the option to share with others. This isn't an easy process and can involve much risk. If you feel safe enough to speak your truth and are prepared for the outcome, you may be ready to take the leap. If you decide to come out, know that it's a personal choice. You decide how, when and with whom this is shared.

Before you disclose

Coming out begins with accepting your own sexual identity. If you're feeling confused or unhappy as you begin this process, you might seek your own therapy first. Therapists can offer support for LGBTQ+ issues and any other areas of importance. They can provide a safe space for you to share your feelings while offering healthy ways to cope. You can search for local support resources or contact your Employee Assistance Program or medical plan to locate a counselor that meets your needs. The more support you have in place, the easier this process can become.

Disclosure: The next step

Now that you're ready to disclose, here are a few things to consider:

- **The people to whom you're about to disclose your personal information.** The bond you have with those you're coming

out to should be one that is built on mutual support and trust. Before you share, ask yourself if this is truly someone whose opinion you value. Is the person openminded and share similar values?

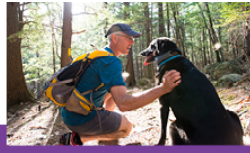
If the person tends to see social issues as black or white, then they may not be as accepting. Homophobia, myths, fears and labels can cloud a person's ability to understand your point of view. If a person has some degree of flexibility, then they might be more open to learning more. It might help to have items on hand such as books or materials that discuss LGBTQ topics.

- **Timing and support.** Also, consider the timing of when you share. Keep in mind that life changes and health can affect how people react. Hopefully, your timing will be comfortable for you and the friend or family member you're about to talk to.

Finally, think about your support system. Would it be helpful to have someone you trust with you either on the phone or in person? This might help lessen your own worries and help you feel supported. Before taking this step, weigh the pros and cons of having someone present.

After disclosure

Now that you've disclosed, assess your feelings. You've taken a huge step in sharing parts of your identity and it's normal to feel a range of emotions. You might feel sad, overwhelmed, relieved or happy.



If the responses were less than positive, take the time you need to regain footing. Be mindful that the people you disclose to may have their own process to go through as they take in new information. Give them time and space. Coming out may cause positive or negative reactions. Some may choose to distance themselves. If this is the case, tap into those in your support circle. They can create a space for you to share your experience as well as offer support. Caring for your own mental health can strengthen your ability to deal with the long-term effects of coming out.

Coming out can present many challenges. Visit the following websites for information, resources and support:

glbthotline.org

nami.org

lgbthealtheducation.org