



Coming Out

What Is “Coming Out of the Closet”?

Coming out is the process of personally accepting your sexual orientation or gender identity and disclosing it to themselves, family, peers, and friends.

There are generally seven stages involved in the coming out process. However, these stages are not set in stone and are simply a guide to help understand what you may be feeling and help you understand what may be going on in your life. People may be in one stage or in multiple stages at once. You may feel a certain way around a group of friends but feel differently around family. Some people may experience all stages or feel more comfortable at where they are in life. Coming out is a process that you will have to engage in many times in your life as you meet new people and find yourself in new situations.

Coming out can be a huge decision and needs to be made when you are ready to work through your feelings and have supports in place. You should not feel pressured to come out and should not come out because you have been pressured to do so. This is a personal decision you have to make. Understanding the different stages of the coming out process will help you decide when the time is right to come out.

Stage One: Identity Questioning

Stage One of coming out is a time when people begin to question their sexual orientation or gender identity. They often begin by asking themselves questions like: *“Am I really straight?”*, *“Should I have been born a different gender?”* It can take years to answer these questions or it could take less time. Some people are never able to accept the answers to these questions and decide to stay at this stage. They may decide to live their lives as heterosexuals or as the gender assigned at birth. Others might feel shocked, scared, or in denial and need to find healthy ways to resolve these feelings before they move on. A lot of people decide to keep their identity questions to themselves during this stage, while some confide in close friends or other people who are already out. It is a good idea to seek out resources that might help determine which sexual orientation or gender identity best fits with how you perceive yourself.

Stage One – Questions for Consideration:

- *What do I know about sexual orientation and gender variance?*
- *How might I “label” my sexual orientation and/or gender identity at this moment?*

- *Am I feeling pressured to come out? (i.e., Has someone asked me if I am LBGQTQ? Has someone called me names? Has someone told me to just accept it?; etc.)*
- *Am I ready to deal with my feelings about my sexual orientation and/or gender identity?*
 - *Is it okay to feel confused about my sexual orientation and/or gender identity?*

Stage Two: Internal Identity Acceptance and Education

When and if you decide to move from stage one into the next stage, you begin to accept the fact that you identify as LBGQTQ. A person in this stage stops asking the question "*Am I LBGQTQ?*" and instead accepts the fact that they are. People in this stage may or may not feel happy or proud of identifying as LBGQTQ. Pride will most likely come later. It is also common to feel scared or nervous during this stage. Accepting your sexual orientation or gender identity is a big step that will most likely mean many changes in your life. Feeling scared of how society, family, friends, co-workers, and members of your religious community will react to your sexual orientation or gender identity is a natural reaction. Just remember that coming out is a process that is not always smooth; however, it can lead to greater self-acceptance and a stronger sense of one's identity.

This stage is also typically where a person in the process of coming out will begin to educate themselves about what it means to be LBGQTQ. If you are reading this booklet, you are probably doing just that. The internet, libraries, and some community organizations, like Planned Parenthood, will have resources to help you learn more about being LBGQTQ. It is important to educate yourself during this stage so that you are better informed as you move into the next stage of coming out: support.

Stage Two - Questions for Consideration:

- *How do I feel about accepting my LBGQTQ identity?*
- *What resources do I need to better educate myself?*
 - *Who can I talk to about questions I might have?*
- *Where can I meet and interact with other LBGQTQ people for support?*

Stage Three: Support

In stage three of the coming out process, you will start looking for people who can offer support. You may choose to come out to a very selective group of people including family and friends who you think will be supportive. Connecting with supportive friends and family is important. If you do not feel comfortable coming out to any of your close friends at first, another good way to start is by telling someone you know who is LBGQTQ. The advice and support of someone who has already come out can be very helpful. Establishing relationships with supportive friends and family will make coming out to others much easier. It is not a good idea to come out during high stress situations. Listen to your intuition and carefully plan who you tell and when you tell them. Again, it is really important for you to find support during this stage of the process.

Stage Three - Questions for Consideration:

- *Who do I think I can trust to tell about my identity?*
 - *How do I think they are going to react?*
- *Have I carefully planned how I am going to tell them?*
- *If they react negatively, am I prepared to deal with their reaction?*

Stage Four: Pride

Once people have established positive, supportive relationships with friends and family, they begin to feel relieved. Feelings of depression, sadness, fear, and isolation begin to disappear and are replaced with feelings of happiness, pride, and empowerment. In the acceptance stage you say things like: "I am queer"; however, in the pride stage you begin to say to yourself "I am queer, and I like it". This indicates a greater comfort with your sense of self. You also begin to make friends with other LBGTQ people and explore the culture.

Stage Four - Questions for Consideration:

- *At what point did I move from just accepting my identity to feeling proud of who I am?*
 - *How am I going to move forward with this new-found pride?*
- *What should I consider as I move into romantic and/or sexual relationships?*

Stage Five: Relationships

At some point, you will want to begin dating and forming romantic and/or sexual relationships. Once you feel pride, you may suddenly feel like "busting out of the closet", letting all of those pent-up tensions loose. It is not the purpose of this information booklet to tell you what to do with your love life, but rather to give you some insight into what you might go through as you come out. However, it is important that you think clearly before acting. Sexual responsibility is so important in today's world, not just for LBGTQ people but for everyone. Again, play it safe and trust your judgment. For more information about LBGTQ sexual health check out Planned Parenthood's website or visit the internet or a local library for resources.

Stage Five - Questions for Consideration:

- *Am I informed about safer sex practices for LBGTQ people?*
- *Am I ready to start a romantic and/or sexual relationship with someone?*

Stage Six: Telling the Family

Coming out to your family is often the most difficult part of the coming out process. Your parents most likely raised you assuming that you would be heterosexual, get married, and have children. When parents first learn that their child is LBGTQ they often feel a sense of loss. It generally takes some time for them to realize that they haven't lost anything and that things like marriage and children are all still possible.

Other parents feel relieved and will tell you that they always knew. It's important to be patient with family members as they may go through these stages as well. You may have known since you were really young that you were LBGTQ, so give your family some time as well.

If you have not yet come out to your parents, you probably feel distanced from them. A large part of your life does, or will, relate to you identifying as LBGTQ. You most likely miss having an open relationship with your family and are tired of keeping secrets from them. If you are in a serious romantic relationship, you probably feel even more distanced from your family. Holidays and family events are probably rough because you either cannot spend those events with your partner or your partner is forced to masquerade as your "friend" or "roommate".

Plan carefully how you are going to come out to your parents and prepare yourself for any reaction they might have. All parents react differently. Some react harshly by cutting off communication and support between themselves and their children. Most parents, however, are understanding and supportive. In most cases, parents need time to deal with the news. Before you come out to your

parents, carefully consider any reaction they might have. In any case, remember that your first priority should always be yourself.

Timing and the way in which you tell your parents and family are extremely important things to consider. Remember that you want your parents to respect you for who you are. Therefore, the way in which you come out should be respectable. Trusting your judgment is so important when coming out to your parents. You know your parents better than almost anyone. Like anything related to coming out, listen to your intuition and play it safe.

Stage Six - Questions for Consideration:

- *Am I prepared to deal with my parents'/family's reaction?*
- *Have I carefully considered how and when I am going to tell?*
- *Am I prepared to answer questions about my sexual orientation and/or gender identity if they ask?*
- *If you are financially dependent on your parents, are you prepared to support yourself for a while?*

Stage Seven – Balance

The last stage of coming out that most people experience is characterized by the feeling that you can live a balanced life. In this stage, being LGBTQ becomes just another part of who you are. There will always be new people in your life that you will have to come out to, so in a sense the process of coming out never really ends. However, in this final stage, coming out becomes less of an issue and more of a part of life for LGBTQ people.

Stage Seven - Questions for Consideration:

- *Am I comfortable coming out to new people I meet?*
- *Are there ways that I can support others in their coming out process?*

Remember that coming out is a process that every LGBTQ person experiences in different ways. This booklet should be used to better inform you as you journey through coming out.

Organizations that may be helpful:

Planned Parenthood:
1-877-NO MYTHS
(1-877-666-9847)
In St. John's (709) 579-1009

Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay and Transgender at Memorial University of Newfoundland:
(LBGT-MUN) 864-7619

Kids Help Phone (24 hours):
1-800-668-6868

Egale Canada
(LGBT human rights organization)
1-888-204-7777

PFLAG Canada
1-888-530-6777
In St. John's: (709) 722-5791
email: stjohnsnl@pflagcanada.ca
operations@pflagcanada.ca

(A national organization that offers support to families of LGBT people)

Related Organizations:

Aids Committee of Newfoundland and Labrador	
St. John's	709 579-8656
	Toll-Free: 1-800-563-1575
Corner Brook	1-709-634-5000 ext. 5436

If you have further questions regarding sexual decision making or safer sex practices; or would like to see a health care provider regarding any sexual health matter, please contact us.

Sexual Health Questions? We Have Answers!

Location:

47 St. Clare Avenue,
St. John's, NL, A1C 2J9

Hours:

Monday: 9am - 4:30pm
Tuesday: 9am - 4:30pm
Wednesday: 9am - 4:30pm
Thursday: 12pm – 6:00pm
Friday: 9am - 4:30pm

Phone:

579-1009
Toll Free 1-877-NO MYTHS
(1-877-666-9847)

Website:

www.plannedparenthoodnlshc.com

Email:

pp.nlshc@gmail.com

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