



JUST BE YOU.

COMING OUT GUIDE

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in association with



JUST BE YOU.

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Coming out

Coming out is when you decide to tell another person about your sexual or gender orientation. You should only disclose your sexual or gender identity *when you are ready* and not when someone else tells you that you're ready.

Coming out is an act of bravery and authenticity, it is easy for some people, and for others it can be quite difficult. It is important to know that **you are not alone** and that just because you may be LGBTI, this does not make you different or less than normal in any way, **you are you**, and that's all that matters.

The most important thing about coming out is that you are ready. This is something that you have to decide for yourself and you need to spend some time thinking about it and weighing up the benefits and the disadvantages. If you feel like you are not ready to tell anyone that's perfectly fine, you don't have to yet. Take some more time researching coming out and become more comfortable with the idea before taking the step.

If you feel however you are ready then you need to decide how to come out, ensuring that you are comfortable saying the words “I am (a) lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgendered”. This can be done by repeating it in a mirror or saying it out loud when you are sure you are alone.

Important Points:

- ▶ *Make sure you are ready*
- ▶ *Don't rush it*
- ▶ *Be comfortable saying the words to yourself before saying them to someone else*
- ▶ *There is nothing wrong with you*
- ▶ *You are not alone*

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Who to tell and when to tell

Deciding who to tell is a very important part of coming out. The person needs to be someone you trust, like your best friend, brother, sister, cousin, aunt or uncle etc.

Alternatively if you would rather tell someone like a teacher, Doctor, Youth Worker or even your parents first, that's ok too.

Once you have decided who to tell first you need to decide on when you would like to tell them, make sure that the day you decide on is not a wedding, funeral, anniversary, birthday or a day with an event such as Christmas or Easter. This is because generally these days are stressful with emotions running high, and you may not get a positive response on these days. It is also important that you are sober and the person you are telling is also free from alcohol.

You should choose somewhere that is quiet and pick a time when there isn't much going on, for example, sitting at your kitchen table having a cup of tea, or in a café where it is just you and the person you are going to tell. Try not to do it when you and the person you want to tell are doing something stressful or something which is taking your full attention.

Most importantly don't rush this, take your time pick the right moment and only do it if you feel comfortable doing so.

Important Points:

- ▶ *Only you can decide who you want to tell*
- ▶ *The person should be someone you trust*
- ▶ *Don't do it on an event day or a day where emotions are running high*
- ▶ *Make sure there are no distractions*
- ▶ *Make sure this is what you want to do don't let yourself be forced into it*

How You Want To Tell Them

There are a number of different ways to come out to someone. You can :

- ⇒ Tell them face to face
- ⇒ Write them a letter
- ⇒ Text (should not be done when telling parents)
- ⇒ Over the phone (should not be done when telling parents)

But ultimately it is up to you, you have control over the way you decide to come out to someone and you should only do what you are comfortable doing.

If you choose to tell someone face to face you should practice what you want to say first, this can be done through having the conversation in your head, or practicing in front of a mirror. It is important to have an idea of what you want to say first as this will stop you looking for words mid-sentence or having too many long pauses which may cause you to lose track of the conversation.

Once you are happy with what you want to say try to get the person on their own in a space that you are comfortable in. You could start the conversation by simply saying “there is something I want to talk/ tell to you about” and let the conversation flow from there.

It is very important to remember that some people will need time to adjust to this news so if you don't get the reaction you wanted don't be disheartened it may just need some time to sink in.

Writing a letter is a good way to get your emotions and feelings on to a page especially if you tend to shy away from direct conversations or feel uncomfortable verbalising your feelings. An example of a coming out letter is on the next page this can be used as a template or just to give you ideas on how to write your own.

Texting someone is another option use when you have decided to come out, however this option should not be used if you are telling your parents, they deserve more than just a short text.

If you have friends that you would like to tell this may be a good option but again, this should only be done if you trust your friend implicitly and you can also request that the message be deleted afterwards . This again is a good option if you feel anxious about telling someone face to face and don't want to give them a letter.

In cases where a best friend or sibling have moved away, a conversation over the phone may be the only way to come out to them. It is a little impersonal so should only be done if there is no other option. Telling someone over the phone gives both of you control over the conversation and when to end it if the reaction doesn't go the way you wanted. It is important though that the person you are telling is on their own and not distracted, for example driving, when they take the call.

Important Points:

- ▶ *Choose whatever method you feel comfortable with*
- ▶ *Make sure you trust the person implicitly*
- ▶ *Do whatever feels right for you*
- ▶ *Make sure this is what you want to do don't let yourself be forced into it*

Dear Mom & Dad,

I am writing you this letter because I have something very important to tell you and I want to get this out right. Just so you do not get worried everything is alright. I am more than alright. For the first time in a long time I am truly happy. I love both of you so much that I can not truly express how I feel. What I want to tell you is that I am gay.

For years I have been struggling with my sexuality and a while ago came to terms with who I truly am. I feel that I can not hold onto this anymore and finally feel comfortable enough to share this part of my life with you. This letter has been written for a while, but with everything going on over the year I wanted to wait until things settled down.

I want you two to know that I am very much at ease and secure with who I am. For a long time I agonized why I was not in a relationship with a woman and was wondering what was wrong with me. For a long time I thought if I met the "right" woman I would fall in love, marry, etc. After some time of soul searching I discovered what I am really looking for. Even though at times I was happy, I was not truly happy because I did not have someone in my life that I could love. Now I am very optimistic that I will not be alone.

I do not want you to blame yourself at all for this. You both have loved me more than any parents could love their son/daughter. This is just who I am. I do not know why it took me this long to come to the realization that I am gay and I am not going to look back and ask why. It is just the way that it happened. My situation is not unique. There are a number of people who later in life who discover their true self and realize that it is never too late to be happy.

Like I said before, I love you two so much. You both have always been there for me. This is another reason why I have found it so difficult to tell you until now. I am so sorry if this causes you any pain. I have prayed for a long time it does not. Mom you have told me that you are proud of me and I have grown up to be a good son. I hope you still feel this way. I am the same person as before. Nothing else has changed. If you have any questions just ask me. Like always I will be as honest with you as I can.

Your Son/Daughter,

Ed

It Takes Time

We all have this hope in our heads that when we come out the other person will be accepting the minute we say the words “I am Gay/a Lesbian/Bisexual/ Transgendered”. Sadly, however, this is not always the case. More often than not the person you are going to tell, especially if they are your parents, will need time to adjust to the news.

It is very important to allow the other person or people time to process the information that you have given. You need to be patient with them just remember that you have had a lot longer to deal with this than they have so if they are quiet or don't talk about it a lot that's okay, they will in their own time.

When you have told the other person or people they may have questions for you. Chances are this is a new thing for them too and they may not fully understand it. It is your job to help guide them through it.

One of the most frequent questions is “how do you know you are LGBTI?” or “have you tried to not be LGBTI?”

Don't be offended by these questions they are simply trying to resolve this in their own minds, you should be honest with them and answer the questions as calmly as you can reminding them that you have no control over your sexuality or gender identity you were born LGBTI.

Sometimes the person you are telling does not react positively the important thing here is to ensure your own safety. You will generally have a good idea how a person will react before you tell them. Take this in to account when you are deciding on the method and the location in which to tell them. If you are worried about a certain scenario and have already told a friend or a sibling then you may want to bring them along for moral support.

Important Points:

- ▶ *Things may not go the way you hoped they would but that's okay*
- ▶ *It may take some time for people to adjust*
- ▶ *Be patient*
- ▶ *Stay calm*
- ▶ *Help them by answering their questions as best as you can*

When Not To Come Out

Unfortunately there are always times when it is in your best interest not to disclose your sexual identity.

These scenarios would be where you feel like your personal safety and wellbeing might be at risk if you come out as LGBTI.

As previously mentioned you should already have had an indication on how your target person may react you need to make a judgement call.

If you find yourself in one of these situations it is very important that you seek support from either a teacher or a youth worker.

If you have no way to contact either you should talk to one of your close friends preferably someone who you are out to or planning on coming out to in the near future.

You are not alone. There is confidential support, such as the **LGBTI Helpline 1890 929 539**, whom you could talk to.

Not being able to come out does not mean that you will never be able to come out. Sometimes it just means waiting until you are able to survive on your own or even it can be as simple as moving away to college before coming out for example. It should be noted that you are the only one who can decide when to come out how you should come out and if it is a good idea or not.

Important Points:

- ▶ *You don't have to come out*
- ▶ *Sometimes it is not safe to come out*
- ▶ *Seek support*
- ▶ *Talk to someone*
- ▶ *LGBT Helpline **1890 929 539***

What to do if someone comes out to you

If a student or a young person comes out to you it is important to remember to stay positive and to listen to what the young person is saying. Let them finish telling you before you try to respond, as this is something that they will have spent a lot of time thinking about, therefore it is important to let them finish.

When a young person or student comes out to you there is always a slight temptation to say that you had guessed or that you thought they were however it is not a good idea to tell the young person that you have thought this or that you already knew. The reason for this is that the young person may have been trying to hide their sexuality or may have been struggling trying to act “straight” by saying that you already knew or guessed may cause the young person to become panicked and wonder who else knows. This may force the young person to come out to others faster than they had planned or may cause them to feel forced to come out.

When the young person has finished coming out to you it is important to reassure the young person that they are not alone and that roughly 1 in 10 people also identify as LGBTI. You should remind them that they are perfectly normal and that there is nothing wrong with them. You can also direct the young person to other supports such as the youth groups or information websites contained later on in this guide.

Above all else ensure the young person understands that you will not tell anyone else about their sexual or gender identity. In the event that you have a child welfare or protection concern, normal procedure should be followed, reporting everything to the Child Protection Officer.

Important Points:

- ▶ *Stay Positive*
- ▶ *Listen to what the young person is saying*
- ▶ *Let them finish*
- ▶ *Reassure them that they are normal*
- ▶ *Confidentiality is key*

Supports:

FDYS LGBTI Project Worker

☎ (053) 9123262
 ✉ david.clark@fdys.ie
 🌐 www.fdys.ie

LGBT Helpline

☎ 1890 929 539
 🌐 www.belongto.org

Belong To

🌐 www.hse.ie

HSE

🌐 www.teni.ie

TENI (Trans Support)

🌐 www.glen.ie

Gay & Lesbian Equality Network

LGBTI - Frequently Asked Q's

Q. What does LGBTI stand for?

A. LGBTI stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and intersex.

Q. Why are people LGBTI?

A. Nobody knows for sure. There are some theories that it is all in the genetics of the person, while others believe it's a combination of your genetics and the environment you were raised in. It is certain, however, that it is not an illness or a defect, and LGBTI people are all perfectly normal.

Q. Why do LGBT people come out?

A. Imagine you have a secret about yourself from the age of twelve and the weight of that secret gets heavier the older you get. Now imagine having to sneak around with someone you are dating because you don't want anyone to find out. Now imagine the same thing with every partner after that. Constantly hiding can have a negative effect on a person's mental health, possibly the only way to combat this is to come out and to disclose your sexual or gender identity.

Q. What does Transgendered mean?

A. Transgendered is an umbrella term that represents the vast number of different gender identities that people identify as.

Q. What is intersex?

A. An intersex person is born with sexual anatomy, reproductive organs, and/or chromosome patterns that do not fit the typical definition of male or female. This may be apparent at birth or become so later in life. An intersex person may identify as male or female or as neither. Intersex status is not about sexual orientation or gender identity; intersex people experience the same range of sexual orientations and gender identities as non-intersex people.

Q. Is it possible to change a person's sexual identity?

A. Simply put, no. A person is born LGBTI they do not suddenly decide one day to become lesbian, gay or bi-sexual. There is a debate that has been ongoing on whether or not it is caused by nature or nurture. Recent studies that have been accredited and peer reviewed suggest it is nature.

Q. If a young person comes out to me how should I react?

A. If you are in a situation that a young person is coming out to you, you should first realise that this young person is placing their trust in you by telling you something which in all likelihood they have not told anyone else. The best way to react is positively, congratulating the young person on coming out and commenting on how it is a huge step for them. Talk to the young person as if you were talking to any other young person, show them respect and remember to respect their decision if they want anyone else to know and above all else, unless you have a child welfare or protection concern, you should not tell anyone else that the young person is LGBTI.

Q. Should I tell the other people?

A. No, they have trusted this with you, you should not tell other people.

Q. If you think a young person is LGBTI, should you ask them?

A1. It is very seldom for it to be appropriate to ask someone if they are LGBTI. Your perception of what LGBTI is may not be the same for everyone and it may cause distress to the young person if you ask them. If they are not LGBTI, it could make them worry that they come across as LGBTI and may again cause them distress or change their personality. (LGBTI Ireland Report 2106)

A2. If they are LGBTI and are not ready to tell anyone yet you may expose them before they are ready and this too may have serious consequences for the young person. The best way is to make it known to everyone that the setting, whatever that may be, is inclusive and welcoming of all young people regardless of their sexual or gender orientation. This can be achieved through posters for example in the venue simply stating it or being willing to talk about it.

LGBTI - Terms

Advocate (noun) (1) a person who actively works to end intolerance, educate others, and support social equity for a marginalized group. (Verb) (2) To actively support/plea in favor of a particular cause, the action of working to end intolerance, educate others, etc.

Ally Typically any non-LGBTI person who supports and stands up for the rights of LGBTI people, though LGBT people can be allies, such as a lesbian who is an ally to a transgender person.

Biphobia Aversion toward bisexuality and bisexual people as a social group or as individuals. People of any sexual orientation can experience such feelings of aversion. Biphobia is a source of discrimination against bisexuals, and may be based on negative bisexual stereotypes or irrational fear.

Cisnormativity (noun) the assumption, in individuals or in institutions, that everyone is cisgender, and that cisgender identities are superior to Trans* identities or people. Leads to invisibility of non-cisgender identities.

Cissexism The assumption that a cisgender identity is more authentic or natural than a Tran's identity. The belief that a person's sex assigned at birth always remains their real gender (e.g. suggesting that a Tran's woman is "really a man" or a Tran's man is "really a woman").

Closeted (adj.) an individual who is not open to themselves or others about their (queer) 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, job, etc. Also known as being "in the closet." When someone chooses to break this silence they "come out" of the closet. (See coming out)

Coming Out The process of acknowledging one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people. For most LGBTI people this is a life-long process. Some Trans people choose to 'come out' or be "out" about their Trans identities to raise visibility or acknowledge their experiences. Others do not want to 'come out' as they feel this implies that their gender identity is not valid or authentic (e.g. a Trans woman who comes out as Trans may be perceived to be less of a woman).

Drag King (noun) someone who performs masculinity theatrically.

Drag Queen (noun) someone who performs femininity theatrically.

Dyke (noun) a term referring to a masculine presenting lesbian often used derogatorily.

Fag(got) (noun) derogatory term referring to a gay person, or someone perceived as queer. Occasionally used as a self-identifying affirming term by some gay men, at times in the shortened form 'fag'.

Femme (noun & adj) someone who identifies themselves as feminine, whether it be physically, mentally or emotionally. Often used to refer to a feminine presenting queer woman.

FTM A female-to-male Trans person (see definition of Trans man).

Gender Binary (noun) the idea that there are only two genders – male/female or man/woman and that a person must be strictly gendered as either/or.

Gender expression A term which refers to the ways in which we each manifest masculinity or femininity. It is usually an extension of our “gender identity,” our innate sense of being male, female, etc. Each of us expresses a particular gender every day – by the way we style our hair, select our clothing, or even the way we stand. Our appearance, speech, behaviour, movement, and other factors signal that we feel – and wish to be understood – as masculine or feminine, or as a man or a woman.

Hermaphrodite Generally considered derogatory; has been replaced by the term intersex (see definition of Intersex).

Homophobia A range of negative attitudes and feelings toward homosexuality or people who are identified or perceived as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender (LGBTI). It can be expressed as antipathy, contempt, prejudice, aversion, or hatred, may be based on irrational fear, and is sometimes related to religious beliefs.

Hormone Replacement Therapy (HRT) or Hormones The use of hormones to alter secondary sex characteristics. Some Trans people take hormones to align their bodies with their gender identities. Other Trans people do not take hormones for many different reasons (see definition of Transition).

In The Closet Describes a person who keeps their sexual orientation or gender identity a secret from some or all people.

Lipstick Lesbian (noun) usually refers to a lesbian with a feminine gender expression. Can be used in a positive or a derogatory way. Is sometimes also used to refer to a lesbian who is assumed to be (or passes for) straight.

MTF Male-to-female Trans person (see definition of Trans woman).

Passing – (verb) (1) a term for Trans* people being accepted as, or able to “pass for,” a member of their self-identified gender/sex identity (regardless of birth sex). (2) An LGB/queer individual who can is believed to be or perceived as straight.

Questioning For some, the process of exploring and discovering one’s own sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression.

Sex Change Generally considered derogatory; has been replaced by the terms “transition” or “surgery” (see definition of Transition and Surgery).

Sexual orientation The type of sexual, romantic, and/or physical attraction someone feels toward others. Often labeled based on the gender identity/ expression of the person and who they are attracted to. Common labels: lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, etc.

Tranny A slang term for many different Trans identities. Some find this term highly offensive, while others may be comfortable with it as a self-reference, but consider the term derogatory if used by outsiders. It is recommended to avoid using this term.

Transition A process through which some transgender people begin to live as the gender with which they identify, rather than the one assigned at birth. Transition might include social, physical or legal changes such as coming out to family, friends, co-workers and others; changing one's appearance; changing one's name, pronoun and sex designation on legal documents (e.g. driving licence or passport); and medical intervention (e.g. through hormones or surgery).

Transphobia The fear or hatred of transgender people or gender non-conforming behavior. Like biphobia, transphobia can also exist among lesbian, gay, and bisexual people as well as among heterosexual people.

Ze/Hir Alternate pronouns that are gender neutral and preferred by some Trans* people. Pronounced /zee/ and /here/ they replace "he" and "she" and "his" and "hers" respectively. Alternatively some people who are not comfortable/do not embrace he/she use the plural pronoun "they/their" as a gender neutral singular pronoun.

It is important to never out someone as Trans without their permission. Forced outing – whether intentional or unintentional – is a form of transphobia (see definition of Transphobia).

LGBT, LGBTQ, LGBTQA, TBLG These acronyms refer to Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, and Asexual or Ally. Although all of the different identities within "LGBTI" are often lumped together (and share sexism as a common root of oppression), there are specific needs and concerns related to each individual identity

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