

# COMING OUT

Coming out can be one of the most difficult things in a gay or lesbian person's life. You may be planning to tell your parents, close family, friends or colleagues - just one or two, or all of them. It doesn't always go well but it can be the start of getting rid of the secrecy and any feelings you may have of embarrassment or guilt. Use this checklist to help yourself prepare for coming out.

## ▲ ALERT

- You should be aware that making public the fact that you are gay or lesbian may cause problems and expose you to discrimination at your work. (see "[Dealing with Discrimination at Work](#)") It could happen anywhere and not just if you are employed in known homophobic areas like the police, the armed forces or the church. If you need any support or advice on your employment rights contact Lesbian and Gay Employment Rights (LAGER), Unit 1G, Leroy House, 436 Essex Rd., London, N1 3QP. tel. 020 7704 2205 fax 020 7704 6067 Helplines (12pm – 4pm Mon-Fri) Lesbians: 020 7704 8066 Gay Men: 020 7704 6066 web [www.lager.dircon.co.uk](http://www.lager.dircon.co.uk).

## 📄 LIST

### PREPARING TO COME OUT

- Be aware of the health, mood, priorities and problems of those you want to talk to <sup>1</sup>
- Be clear about your own feelings <sup>2</sup>
- Be prepared for your revelation to cause surprise, upset or even anger <sup>3</sup>
- Make sure you are well-informed about homosexuality <sup>4</sup>
- Be ready to learn from each conversation so you are better prepared for the next one
- Remember your coming out will not change you – only, possibly, others' perception of you.
- Talk to other gay or lesbian people you know and trust about their experiences of coming out
- Try to find a local gay or lesbian support group for advice and counselling <sup>5</sup>
- The decision to come out must be yours, taken freely <sup>6</sup>

### HOW TO HANDLE THE COMING OUT CONVERSATION

- Choose somewhere you can both be comfortable
- Get relaxed
- Lead up to the moment
- Give them the news
- Emphasise that you are still the same person they have always known <sup>7</sup>
- Let them know that you want to stay their friend, even if they disapprove
- Let them talk
- If they get hostile just make your excuses and leave before an argument starts
- Keep lines of communication open with people after you have come out <sup>8</sup>
- Give people time to adjust to their new information about you <sup>9</sup>
- Never lose sight of your own self-worth if someone rejects you for being gay or lesbian

## TELLING YOUR PARENTS AND FAMILY

- Affirm mutual love and caring before breaking the news
- Avoid your parents and family finding out from a third party
- Be ready for your parents' embarrassment about others knowing their child is gay or lesbian
- Consider telling one parent first <sup>10</sup>
- Encourage them to meet your partner or other gay or lesbian friends
- Find out if there is a local Parents of Lesbians and Gays organisation to which you can refer them <sup>11</sup>
- Never come out during a family argument
- Remember your parents come from a different generation <sup>12</sup>
- Start by telling a trusted friend to make it easier and use their support later when you tell your family



## TIPS

- <sup>1</sup> Timing can be important when you come out. Mid-life crises of parents, relationship problems of friends or business concerns of employers will affect the other person's receptivity of what you are going to tell them.
- <sup>2</sup> If you are dealing with a lot of guilt or depression, try to get some help or counselling with this before you come out to family, friends or other non-gays. If you are comfortable with your sexuality this will come across and encourage and help people to accept you.
- <sup>3</sup> If your coming out angers or upsets people try not to react angrily or defensively yourself. Try to let others be open and honest about their initial feelings, even if they're negative. Remember, their first reaction may not be the lasting one.
- <sup>4</sup> Before you come out read some good books about homosexuality and coming out that will settle your own doubts, firm up your ideas and enable you to talk rationally to others. For books on coming out, try the following:

### BOOKS

- Merla, Patrick. *Boys Like Us: Gay Writers Tell Their Coming Out Stories* Avon Books 1997 ISBN: 0380788357
- McNaught, Brian. *Now That I'm Out, What Do I Do?* St Martin's Press 1997 ISBN: 0312156162
- Outland, Orland. *Coming Out: A Handbook For Men* Alyson Publications 2000 ISBN: 1555835147

- <sup>5</sup> To find your local gay or lesbian support and counselling groups look in gay magazines and newspapers, or contact the Lesbian and Gay Switchboard in your region. They run a network of telephone helplines offering counselling and advice. To find the nearest Switchboard to you, look in the Telephone Book or contact the London Lesbian and Gay Switchboard at LLGS, PO Box 7324, London, N1 9QS. tel. 020 7837 7324 fax 020 7837 7300. web [www.llgs.org.uk](http://www.llgs.org.uk). The website has links to all the regional Switchboards around the UK.

- <sup>6</sup> Don't be driven by feelings of guilt caused by others who believe everyone should come out or people who snoop or try to pressure you into it. You decide when, how and to whom you will come out.



Remember when you are coming out to a close friend or relation to remind them that you were gay or lesbian yesterday and you will be tomorrow and that if you were a loving and responsible person before, you will be no different in the future.



Even if someone you come out to is initially very negative respond as reasonably and rationally as you can to their questions and statements. They may be in the process of re-examining their own myths and stereotypes about gays and lesbians.



Remember that it takes some gay men and lesbians a long time to adjust to their own sexuality and even longer to decide to share the fact with others. Don't expect or demand immediate acceptance from other non-gays.



You may find it easier to come out first to just one of your parents who you think will handle it better. It may make it easier for you but remember the feelings of the other and don't let them feel left out or rejected.



Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (FFLAG) is a group dedicated to supporting parents and their gay, lesbian and bisexual sons and daughters. FFLAG supports the full human and civil rights of gay people. They have about 10 local groups and over 40 parental contact points across the UK, publish a quarterly newsletter and have a national telephone helpline on 01454 852418. They can be contacted at PO Box 153, Manchester, M60 1LP, email [info@fflag.org.uk](mailto:info@fflag.org.uk), web [www.fflag.org.uk](http://www.fflag.org.uk).



Coming out to your mother and father can be difficult because they are of an older, possibly more homophobic era and may find it hard to understand. Remind them that your being gay or lesbian is not a rejection of them, their lifestyle or their values.



## NOTES

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