

Happy Coming Out



COMING OUT

TERMS TO KNOW!

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the gender they were assigned at birth.

Cisnormativity: The assumption that cisgender identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of transgender people.

Heteronormativity: The assumption that heterosexual identity is the norm, which plays out in interpersonal interactions and institutional privileges that further the marginalization of lesbian, gay, and bisexual people.

As a young person, learning about your own LGBTQ identity and coming out in a heteronormative and cisnormative world can be challenging. To help with the coming out process, we've compiled some key things for you to think about and consider as you begin to share your identities around sexuality and gender. This is not prescriptive, and your coming out journey(s) may skip around or return to other parts of the list. No two coming out stories are exactly the same; your coming out will be shaped by the supports that you have in school, at home, or in your community, and the privileges you hold in other aspects of your identity.

There are a number of factors to weigh when you decide to begin sharing about your identities with others. It's important to note that sexuality and gender identities are related to the other identities that people hold and the privileges associated with those identities. Individuals in our community not only hold LGBTQ identities but are also people of color, people with disabilities, immigrants, and people experiencing homelessness. Coming out can be very different for white people than for people of color (PoC), and even within PoC, a variety of experiences and cultural traditions can influence people's understanding of and relationship to LGBTQ identity. Given that we hold multiple identities, we may face multiple oppressions that we all must consider as we learn about ourselves and as we decide how, when, and with whom we share our identities.

LGBTQ CONSIDERATIONS FOR COMING OUT

1. **You get to decide** for yourself when, if, and how you come out.
2. It can help to **find a support person** to come out to one-on-one. This can be a friend, a family member, or an adult at school who you trust. You can never predict or control how people react when you share about your identity, but it may help to tell someone who is LGBTQ or who is actively supportive of LGBTQ rights and affirming of LGBTQ people.
3. **Coming out does not just happen once.** It is a process that happens over and over again because we live in a *heteronormative* and *cisnormative* society, where people are expected to be straight and cisgender. Although this can be intimidating, it can get easier after the first time, and having that emotional support person to talk to along the way can help.
4. **Sexual orientation and gender identity are not set in stone!** “Coming out” by sharing an identity or using certain pronouns doesn’t mean you’ll want to identify that way forever. People should respect your identity, no matter what it is today and know that it might change.
5. **You may have an entirely separate process for “coming out” or sharing about your gender identity.** You get to decide how you express your gender, what you want your gender to be called, and what pronouns you use at any time, and that should be respected.
6. Friends and adults who are supporting you should **respect your own timeline** for coming out. Let people know that just because you’re out to them, doesn’t mean that you are out to everyone. You’re telling them about yourself because you trust them, but this does not mean it is their story to tell or share.
7. People should respect your timeline for coming out. **However, there is always a risk of someone intentionally or accidentally outing you.** If someone does “out” you or share about your identity, relationship, or pronouns without your consent, you may have a wide range of emotions, including being anger or hurt. You do not have to say that it is ok if it was not okay for you. You can tell them how that made you feel, remind them that your identity is your story, not theirs, and that they need to respect that.
8. **When you are ready to come out at school, you should first find out the laws and policies in your area.** This may be especially important for trans and gender-expansive students at single-sex/gender schools, and LGBTQ students at conservative religious schools. You can ask your teachers or school counselors what school protections are in place for LGBTQ students. You may want to start by telling one educator or adult that you trust. You can bring your support person with you if it helps. Eventually, that adult may be able to help you with talking to administrators in the school to see how they can support you. Make sure the educators know whether or not you are out at home, and if you want this communicated or not.
9. It can be helpful before thinking about sharing your own identity to **have some conversations with people at school and home about their feelings** around LGBTQ people and LGBTQ rights. This can serve as a useful gauge of how they might respond to you coming out. However, this still doesn’t

mean that their feelings about LGBTQ people, in general, will be a true indication of how they will react to you if you do come out, but it may be helpful for you to get an idea of their level of support to your coming out process.

10. **You get to decide if coming out is right for you at this time and to this person.** Even if you get a sense that they have positive feelings about LGBTQ people, you may still not feel comfortable yet. And some folks choose not to come out to their families, for example, until they are older (or not at all) for many different reasons. If they depend on their families for emotional and financial support, they may choose to wait until they have a solid community of friends and chosen family, and can financially support themselves.
11. **Hiding parts of your identity can be emotionally difficult** and can make you feel isolated. Try to build a community around yourself. Whether you're ready to tell a person online, a friend in your life, a family member or just yourself, you should know that **you are not alone**, and that being part of the larger LGBTQ community can be a wonderful and joyful part of your identity. If you need support, there are also organizations out there to speak to. The Trevor Project has a hotline with people you can talk to and they have an online community for youth called Trevor Space. Or you can find an LGBTQ youth group at a local LGBTQ center through CenterLink.
12. Finding LGBTQ community during your coming out process can be a good support system. If there are other LGBTQ students at your school or if you have a supportive GSA, reach out to see if they can be a support for you. **Know that community looks different for everyone.** If you don't have a supportive environment around you, follow social media pages, search online for an LGBTQ community center, or watch YouTube videos made by and for people in the LGBTQ community talking about their own experiences. Remember you're not alone, there are plenty of people out there who are in the LGBTQ community and loving it!

We hope that this list has some ideas that may help you think about coming out. Know that your coming out process and story is going to be different than anyone else's because it is *yours*. Whether your process is simple or complex, you are a beautiful composition of all of the identities that you hold (race, gender, class, ability, etc.) and that's what makes it beautiful. It makes you an individual. It makes you, you. You know yourself best, what you need, when you need it, and how to tell your story. You've got this!

DID YOU PARTICIPATE IN THIS ACTIVITY? TELL US HOW IT WENT AND WHAT COULD HAVE BEEN BETTER!
EMAIL US AT STUDENTS@GLSEN.ORG OR EDUCATORS@GLSEN.ORG.