Coming Out

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 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, people experiencing homelessness, or a combination of these things. 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.

Terms To Know

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity and expression are aligned with the sex 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.

LGBTQ+ Considerations For Coming Out

- You get to decide for yourself when, if, and how you come out.
- It can help to find a support person to come out to first 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 actively supports LGBTQ+ rights and people affirming of LGBTQ+ people.
- Coming out does not just happen once; it is a process that can happen many times due to our heteronormative and cisnormative society. Although this can be intimidating, it can get easier after the first time, and having that support person to talk to along the way can help.
- 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.
- No two coming out experiences are the same. 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.

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- Supportive friends and adults will respect your 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.
- If someone does "out" you or share about your identity, relationship, or pronouns without your consent, it is okay to be upset, angry, or hurt. Tell them how that made you feel, remind them that your identity is your story, not theirs, and that they need to respect that.
- When you are ready to come out at school find out the protections for LGBTQ+ students 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. 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. 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.
- Before sharing your own identity, it can be helpful to have conversations with people at school and at 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 if you do come out, but it may be helpful to get an idea of their level of support for your to your coming out process.
- You get to decide if coming out is right for you. Even if you get a sense that someone has positive feelings about LGBTQ+ people, you may still not feel comfortable coming out to them yet. 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.
- Hiding parts of your identity can be emotionally difficult and isolating. 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 resources out there for you. The **Trevor Project** has a **hotline** with counselors you can talk to as well as an online community for youth called **Trevor Space**. Or, you can find an LGBTQ+ youth group at a local LGBTQ+ center through **CenterLink**.
- Use local LGBTQ+ communities as a 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, and if you feel safe doing so, follow social media pages, search online for an LGBTQ+ community center, or watch YouTube videos made by and for LGBTQ+ people, talking about their own experiences. Remember, you are not alone! There is a huge, thriving, LGBTQ+ community out there to support you.

Your coming out process and story is going to be different than everyone 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!**