

# Some Straight Talk on Coming Out

## What Is "Coming Out?"

*Coming out is the process of identifying oneself as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer/questioning (LGBTQ) or disclosing this self-identification to others.*



*"There is no one right or wrong way to come out. It's a lifelong process of being ever more open and true with yourself and others—done in your own way and in your own time."*

—Human Rights Campaign 2011



## Deciding to Tell Others

### Benefits of Coming Out

- Living an open and whole life.
- Developing closer, more genuine relationships.
- Building self-esteem from being known and loved for who you really are.
- Reducing the stress of hiding your identity.
- Connecting with others who are LGBTQ.
- Being part of a strong and vibrant community.
- Helping to dispel myths and stereotypes about who LGBTQ people are and what their lives are like.
- Becoming a role model for others.
- Making it easier for younger LGBTQ people who will follow in your footsteps.

### Risks of Coming Out

- Not everyone will understand or be accepting.
- Family, friends, classmates, co-workers, or people of influence may be shocked, confused, or even hostile.
- Some relationships may permanently change.
- You may experience harassment or discrimination.
- Your physical safety may be at risk.
- Some young people, especially those under age 18, may be thrown out of their homes or lose financial support from their parents.



### Telling Family and Friends

Some reactions you may want to prepare for:

- Some parents or caregivers may react in ways that hurt; they may cry, get angry, or feel embarrassed.
- Some parents or caregivers will feel honored and appreciative that you entrusted them with this truth about yourself.
- Just as you needed time to come to terms with who you are, some parents may need time to come to terms with your identity. They may ask where they "went wrong" or if they did something "to cause this." Assure them that they did nothing wrong and that there is nothing wrong with you.
- Some parents already suspected that you are LGBTQ and may have been waiting for you to tell them, and find your doing so a relief.

### Remember:

**It may take time for parents to come to terms with the information—this is big news, and there is no telling how they will adjust or how long it will take to adjust. Good or bad, their initial reaction may not reflect their feelings in the long-run. Their reactions are based on previous experiences, beliefs, or assumptions. You are not responsible for, or in control of, how they react.**

- When deciding to disclose to friends, do not assume their reaction, and be prepared for the unexpected. Friends who you might would be in your corner may not be, and those whom you did not expect to be accepting might be your biggest supporters.
- Provide information and resources to your friends to help them to understand and learn more.

## You're in Charge:

It's important to remember that you are in charge of your coming out journey, no one else. Weigh out the benefits and risks of being open about who you are and decide who you want to confide in and when.

Also keep in mind that there is no right or wrong way to come out. You may want to come out to some and not others or socially but not professionally. However you do it, and to what degree, is up to you.

Gender identity and sexual orientation is only a piece of the unique puzzle that makes up you, it is not who you are; in other words, it does not define you.

Being open about who you are and living that way does not change who you are as a person.



HRC, (2011). A resource guide to coming out. Washington, DC: Human Rights Campaign. Retrieved from [www.hrc.org/comingout](http://www.hrc.org/comingout)

## About the LGBTQA Initiative

Members in the community gather and give input as to how **Big Brothers Big Sisters** can effectively recruit, retain, and sustain members of the **LGBTQA community**. In an effort to maximize the positive effects of mentoring and increase recruitment strategies, we seek ways of connecting with LGBTQA communities as allies and advocates.

For more information about BBBS's LGBTQ Initiative, contact **Jesse Gilliam** at [jesse.gilliam@bbbsps.org](mailto:jesse.gilliam@bbbsps.org) or **206.763.9060 x203**

## Be Open with Yourself

Opening up to the possibility that you or your loved one may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or even questioning means opening up to the idea that you're on a path that's your own. It's also why coming out and living more openly is a profoundly liberating experience.



## This Is a Normal Process

The coming out process is normal, and it's absolutely a natural response, for those doing so, to feel:

- Scared
- Confused
- Vulnerable
- Empowered
- Exhilarated
- Relieved
- Proud
- Uncertain
- Brave
- Affirmed

Few of us have been told that we may fall in love with a person from the same sex or that we may identify as a gender that differs from the body in which we were born. Many LGBTQ people are scared, worried, and/or confused when faced with this reality.



**Big Brothers Big Sisters**  
of Puget Sound

1600 S Graham St  
Seattle WA 98108-2821  
206.763.9060

621 Tacoma Ave S Ste 302  
Tacoma WA 98402-2330  
253.396.9630

[www.bbbsps.org](http://www.bbbsps.org)