

Making a Coming Out Plan

When you're ready to tell that first person – or even those first few people – give yourself time to prepare. Think through your options and make a deliberate plan of whom to approach, when and how.

You may want to ask yourself the following questions:

What kind of signals are you getting?

You can get a sense of how accepting people will be by the things they say – or don't say – when LGBT-related issues come up. Try to bring them up yourself by talking about an LGBT-themed movie, TV character or news event. If a person's reactions are positive, chances are he or she will be more accepting of what you have to tell them.

Are you well informed about LGBT issues?

The reactions of others will most likely be based on a lifetime of misinformation, and in some cases even negative portrayals of LGBT people. If you've done some reading on the subject, you'll be prepared to answer their concerns and questions with reliable and accurate information.

Do you know what it is you want to say?

Particularly at the beginning of the coming out process, many people are still answering tough questions for themselves and are not ready to identify as being lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender. That's OK. Maybe you just want to tell someone that you're attracted to someone of the same sex, or that you feel uncomfortable with the expectations of cultural "gender norms." Maybe you just want to tell someone about a new same-sex attraction, or that you're feeling your true gender does not align with cultural "gender norms." Labels aren't important; your feelings are. Also, you may want to try writing out what you want to say to help organize and express your thoughts clearly.

Do you have support?

You don't have to do this alone. A support system is an invaluable place to turn to for reassurance. Sources of support can be other LGBT people who are living openly, LGBT hotlines, school guidance counselors, a supportive member of the clergy or, if you are coming out for the second or third time, perhaps the first person you opened up to initially. A supportive mental health professional can often help people become more comfortable. In fact, these are the first people some of us come out to.

Is this a good time?

Timing can be very important. Be aware of the mood, priorities, stresses and problems of those to whom you would like to come out. Be aware that if they're dealing with their own major life concerns, they may not be able to respond constructively to yours.

Can you be patient?

Some people will need time to deal with this new information, just as it took time for many of us to come to terms with being LGBT. When you come out to others, be prepared to give them the time they need to adjust to what you've said. Rather than expect immediate understanding, try to establish an ongoing, caring dialogue.