

COMING OUT

Information for Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender Young People
How do I know if I'm LGBT?

Figuring out who you are and accepting yourself is the first step for anyone thinking about coming out. This first stage of discovering your sexuality and/or gender identity can be a confusing time. If you are unsure of your sexual orientation, you may feel that you are attracted to the same sex, a different sex or both.

For those discovering their gender identity, you may feel your body does not always fit in with your birth sex. It's OK to take time to figure out whether you are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or straight. Only you can decide what feels right for you and regardless of what the answer is, it's perfectly fine to be gay, trans, straight, etc. or not to define yourself by any of these labels.

WHY TELL

Coming out can be a long process of self-discovery and can include informing others about yourself when you are ready. The beginning of this journey can be a very anxious time, but once you know and accept your sexuality/gender identity, it can be the start of a positive chapter in your life. Before coming out to others, it is important that you are ready to tell others and that you are doing it for the right reasons. For example, wanting to be honest with others, to share your pride in who you are or to make it easier for you to meet other LGBT young people, are some of many reasons why people tell others.

If you are doing it as a result of pressure from a partner or friends, or to fit in, then perhaps you should think about "How people will react?" and "Will I be treated the same as before?" For most people, coming out is a good thing, in fact many find it to be one of the best things they ever did! After coming out you might find that a weight has been lifted off your shoulders and that you no longer have to hide an important part of who you are

"I found that the more people I told, the more positive experiences and positive supports I received, which helped me through the tougher ones."

WHO TO TELL

Some people find it easier to first come out to a close friend or to somebody they respect and who accepts them for who they are. This could be a teacher, a youth worker or somebody else that might have LGBT resources. Others feel it's important to come out to family members before anyone else. Regardless of who you choose to come out to (or not), it is important that you are happy for them to know. Ask yourself "Do they need to know?", "Will they tell anyone else?", "How might they react?" and "Am I happy with other people knowing right now?" Remember, you do not need to come out to everyone at once.

"Telling my friends first helped me a lot because it allowed me to share and voice my feelings. I was able to sort out my own thoughts so that I could approach my family with a levelled head."

HOW TO TELL

There is no right and wrong way to come out to someone. What's important is that you do it in a way that suits you. The following tips might be useful if you decide you're ready to tell others.

Timing: Consider a time when you and the other person are relaxed and not pushed for time. Give yourself the space to discuss your coming out and for them to ask questions. Will they have your full attention or is one of you feeling emotional? If you or the other person is preoccupied with other issues, perhaps it would be best to wait for a better opportunity to come up.

Where: Choose a place that will give you privacy and where you are not likely to get interrupted. If it's someone you think will react well, then the location is probably less important. However if you are worried about a negative reaction, choose a place that you feel safe in, and perhaps somewhere public or bring someone you know will support you

Talk to others: Talking to other young LGBT people about their experiences of coming out can be very reassuring that you are not alone in feeling the way you do. You may have some fears before coming out that you might want to put to rest. Joining one of the many LGBT youth groups is a great way to find new friends and learn from their experiences.

Resources: Having resources at hand can be helpful. The websites recommended in this leaflet also have a load of info you'll find helpful, as do many libraries.

"I came out to my best friend first. I don't know why but I did! It just felt right at the time. She just hugged me and told me that she didn't care, that I was still the same person to her"

AFTER TELLING SOMEONE ELSE

You may feel any number of emotions depending on how the other person reacted. Most commonly people have a positive experience, with friends and family happy that you told them. After telling someone you may feel more at ease with them, as you no longer have to hide who you really are.

If you're coming out has not had the reaction you expected or hoped for, remember that you have had time to think about who you are and what you wanted to say. For others, they may need time to get used to this news. If they have little to say, perhaps they are afraid to say the wrong thing. Your coming out may be a first for them, and they simply might not know how to react

You might be told that this is 'just a phase', and that you will 'grow out of it.' It is true that some people have same-sex experiences in their youth and go on to identify as straight, but it's also true that many go on to identify as being LGBT. You know yourself better than anyone else, again try and be patient with people.

It is possible that you will be asked questions that may be insensitive. Be patient and assume that some people just haven't had the opportunity to learn about LGBT people before. Answer the questions you are comfortable with, and if you don't know how to reply, then be honest about it.

If someone reacts badly to your coming out, don't blame it on yourself. Give the person some space and consider talking to them at a later stage. If you find yourself in this situation, it can be very helpful to talk to others. Attending a LGBT youth group can provide a sense of belonging for those who join, as well as helping to build confidence, self-esteem and pride in the diversity of LGBT identities as well as the opportunity of getting peer support.

"Me being gay was something so different to my straight friends, that none of them could relate. In a sense, that made me feel quite lonely. Programmes like BeLonG To allowed me the simple opportunity to be with other young people who had similar experiences to me."

WHAT SUPPORTS ARE THERE FOR LGBT YOUNG PEOPLE?

BeLonG To Youth Services is a professional youth service that provides supports for LGBT young people. You can meet LGBT young people in an environment which is safe and youth-centred. There are LGBT Youth Groups around the country, which are run and supervised by professional youth workers. For a full list of the various groups, visit www.belongto.org /01 – 670 6223. To begin with contact BeLonG To who will put you in touch with your nearest LGBT Youth Worker.

WHAT SUPPORTS ARE THERE FOR PARENTS

LOOK – Loving Our Out Kids – is a support group for parents who have a child who is Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender. Formerly known as Parents Support, it was set up in 1980 by a small group of parents who recognised the importance of providing a space for parents to talk with other parents of LGBT children. Parents in LOOK will listen and support, reassure and encourage, and provide information – all in total confidence. www.lovingouroutkids.org /087 2537699

You can also contact LOOK to put you in contact with parents/ parents groups in your area.

AN INFORMATION BOOKLET
**LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL
AND TRANSGENDER**
FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

