WHAT IS COMING OUT?
Coming out is a process that happens again and again; it is not just a one-time deal and it does not follow a linear course. It occurs initially when one acknowledges to oneself (most important and difficult aspect of coming out) and to others that one is lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. They claim that orientation as their own and begin to be more or less public with it.

Coming out to oneself is one of the hardest steps in developing a positive lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity. It involves much soul searching and introspection and a good healthy sense of self-appreciation and acceptance. Coming out to others involves other risks and difficulties depending on who that person is coming out to, how engaged they are with them, how much power they have in the relationship, and how accepting they are.

WHY COME OUT?
For some LGBT people, coming out is a way to honestly express who they are and can end the stress of keeping a secret and living a double life. It can reduce isolation and alienation and can allow for increased support from other LGBT people. Not all LGBT people feel the need to come out to everyone they know. Coming out is not necessarily the goal for all LGBT people all the time.

WHAT ARE PEOPLE AFRAID OF?
Rejection and loss of relationship, especially family and friends who do not understand or approve, are real fears. There is a real possibility of harassment and abuse from others, ranging from verbal insults to physical violence against them or their possessions. In addition, institutionalized discrimination and prejudice can also occur. Examples include losing a job, not being hired for a career, being denied housing and other equal opportunity rights.

WHAT IS INTERNALIZED HOMOPHOBIA?
This occurs when an LGBT individual engages in self-rejecting or self-limiting beliefs and feeling about same-sex intimacy and relationships. This term generally applies to queer people who struggle to accept themselves or aspects of themselves. The homophobia perpetuated in greater society is internalized and becomes reality for the LGBT person.

ARE THERE THEORIES TO EXPLAIN THE COMING OUT PROCESS?
There are multiple theories regarding coming out and they follow similar patterns; the initial stage involves some awareness that another way of being (besides being heterosexual) exists and that it somehow fits the individual. This is followed by attempts to explore that way of being, the LGBT community and culture. This leads to attempts to explore how it fits and how one might feel when acting on one’s curiosity. The next phase is coming to terms with what seems to be one’s identity and orientation, including rationalizing it away and denying it, until some resolution and peace of mind is reached that ends in self acceptance and grows into self-appreciation. And the last stage is a synthesis of one’s sexual orientation with the rest of the person.

Continued...
Making a Coming Out Plan

When you are 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 you 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 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.

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