

# Coming Out

The term "coming out" (of the closet) refers to the life-long process of the development of a positive gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered identity. It is a very long and difficult struggle for many people because they often have to confront many homophobic attitudes and discriminatory practices along the way. Many individuals first need to struggle with their own negative stereotypes and feelings of homophobia which they learned when they were growing up. Before these people can feel good about who they are, they will need to challenge their own attitudes and take them from the lower end of that homophobic continuum (repulsion, pity, tolerance) to feelings of appreciation and admiration. But it often takes years of painful work to develop a positive gay or gender identity. Then, many individuals begin to make decisions about whom to tell that they are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered. Many of these people are afraid to "come out" to their friends and family.

## **What might gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgendered individuals be afraid of?**

- ▼ Rejection - loss of relationships
- ▼ Gossip
- ▼ Harassment/abuse
- ▼ Being thrown out of family
- ▼ Being thrown out of house
- ▼ Having their lover arrested
- ▼ Loss of financial support
- ▼ Losing their job
- ▼ Physical violence

## **How might someone feel after a gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgendered person comes out to them?**

- ▼ Scared
- ▼ Shocked
- ▼ Disbelieving
- ▼ Uncomfortable
- ▼ Not sure what to say
- ▼ Not sure what to do next
- ▼ Wondering why the person "came out"
- ▼ Supportive
- ▼ Flattered
- ▼ Honored
- ▼ Angry
- ▼ Disgusted

## **How might gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgendered individuals feel about their coming out to someone?**

- ▼ Scared
- ▼ Vulnerable
- ▼ Relieved
- ▼ Wondering how the person will react
- ▼ Proud

## **Why might gays, lesbians, bisexuals or transgendered individuals want to come out to friends/relatives?**

- ▼ End the "hiding game"
- ▼ Feel closer to those people
- ▼ Be able to be "whole" around them
- ▼ Stop wasting energy by hiding all the time
- ▼ Feel like they have integrity
- ▼ To make a statement that "gay is ok"

## **What do you think gays, lesbians, bisexuals, or transgendered individuals want from the people they come out to?**

- ▼ Acceptance
- ▼ Support
- ▼ Understanding
- ▼ Comfort
- ▼ Closer friendship
- ▼ That knowing won't negatively affect their friendship
- ▼ A hug and a smile
- ▼ An acknowledgment of their feelings

Developed by Vernon Wall and Jamie Washington, 1989