

Tips for Authentically Owning Your Coming Out Experience (From <https://greatist.com/health/how-to-come-out>)

Most of the time when we talk about “coming out”, it gets framed as a onetime thing, or used as a blanket statement for the idea of shouting our identity from the rooftop. But coming out is different for every person, a truth that can make the process more complicated — or simple. Because, when you come out on your terms, there’s no “wrong” way to do it. Keep in mind coming out doesn’t only happen once. Or there may be multiple people among different communities you might want to tell about your identity, gender, or orientation.

You may also discover several identities later on, as you get older. It’s also okay if you want to come out to friends but not family, or family but not at work at first. This experience can be exciting for some people and nerve wracking for others, and the good news is you don’t ever have to rush it. Like many other learning experiences, coming out is a process. There may even be [stages you’ll pass through](#), such as self-discovery, disclosure to others, socialization with other LGBTQ+ people, positive self-identification, integration and acceptance, and the lifelong journey. They won’t necessarily come in that order but you also don’t have to jump into the deep end of the pool right away. There are many questions to coming out, from, “Is it safe to come out?” to “Am I ready?” Spend some time with self-discovery.

Coming out to yourself can be the most powerful, important part of the journey, especially because it can take years to figure out which identities feel right to you. This is part of the self-discovery phase, where you can experiment with where you are, how you want to talk to others, how you present to the world, and more before telling others. Developing self-acceptance can help. If you feel you’re still learning about yourself, whether that’s finding the words or communities that feel good to you before you tell anyone else, that’s more than OK. Take some time to read the work of people before you, sit with yourself and ask hard questions that might take days to answer.

Maybe you want people you’ve been spending time with who are all Bisexual+ to know you are too. Or you want to date someone new and believe they’re under the impression you identify differently. Whatever it is, there is no “bad” reason to come out, as long as it’s on your terms and not a retaliation to trigger anger or shock.

It is important to realize, you also don’t have to come out. You’re not any less lesbian, queer, or transgender if you don’t feel the need to let the world know. This is your personal experience and it’s about how you want to exist in the world, and how you want others to see you. Not coming out doesn’t invalidate your experience or make you less than. When you’re ready, decide who to tell and when. If you have LGBTQ+ friends or family, a trusted mentor or therapist, these might be the safest people to tell first, and provide you with some acceptance and confidence, as well as advice for coming out to others. It’s up to you and about who you feel the most comfortable telling first, before choosing a time and place that works for you. Remember that no one can force you to come out, and if it feels like it will be unsafe for you to tell them for whatever reason, you don’t have to.

Keep safety options on hand. If people you’re considering coming out to have said disparaging or harmful things about LGBTQ+ people before, have openly been homophobic or transphobic, it’s important to think about if you’ll be safe with them knowing. It’s also important to find out if they’d be open to changing their language, behaviors, and beliefs. If they aren’t, or show evidence that they would engage in discrimination or hateful and harmful actions, it might be good to make a safety plan before coming out. Your plan can involve knowing who you can turn to or where you can stay if it somehow becomes unsafe to be where you are. Find safety resources at the end of the [Coming Out Handbook](#) from the Trevor Project.

Explore how to gauge the tolerance of people you tell. The group or community you tell might have some questions, and that’s okay as long as they’re respectful. While research can tell you [some identities may experience more rejection than others](#), how people around you react is not based on stats. To gauge how tolerant or affirming someone is, you may want to pay attention to their reaction when you:

- share a news story of someone who shares a similar identity
- use specific language and how they respect or support you
- pose a hypothetical situation around an identity change

This may also not translate to an authentic reaction when you come out to them as it's not direct communication. But if you're worried about safety, it can be a good metric. It also informs how they might treat or support your community and others who share your identity in the future.

Think about past conversations, asking yourself:

- What language do they use about gay people?
- Do they have LGBTQIA+ friends? How do they speak about trans people?
- Do they have transgender friends?
- How have they been supportive of you during difficult situations in the past?
- What's their opinion on issues that affect the LGBTQIA+ community?

Don't let myths define your coming out experience. As mentioned, the idea that you only have to do it once is a myth. The idea that coming out is no big deal or that it's the biggest deal in the world, or everyone has the same experience are also all untrue. Again, it's a unique experience for everyone, and you're not wrong for how you choose to do it or not do it. The most important part of coming out is doing it on your terms, in a way that honors your authentic self.

Looking at different ways to come out:

To parents

Coming out to your parents is no small feat. Biological, adopted, or guardian — the people who raised you are usually the people whom you want to accept you the most, and depending on your parents' politics and personal views, it can be scary or stressful. Consider their thoughts, feelings, and ways of supporting (or not supporting) LGBTQ+ people before coming out to them. If it feels safe for you, you can find a time to sit down with them or call them and tell them that you have something important you want to share.

To friends

Next to your parents, your friends are practically chosen family — or they can be. If you have friends who are part of the community or share the same identity, consider reaching out to them first. If they aren't, think about how they talk about LGBTQ+ people, if you normally feel comfortable talking to them about other important things in your life, and how supportive they've been of you in the past. Also consider talking to them in person, via video, or a phone call, if you're concerned about screenshots of texts floating around and you aren't ready for more people to know.

To close family

When coming out to close family, consider the same things you would with your parents and friends. It might be good to have resources on-hand to help facilitate a conversation, or ask a sibling or family member whom you've already come out for help.

To extended family (grandparents, aunts/uncles, etc.)

Rather than focusing on the reaction your extended family might have, focus on what takeaway you need them to understand about your identity and why you want them to know. For example, do you want them to use the right pronouns or stop gendering your future partner to be? Then ask yourself: Will they respect your boundaries and wishes? What's the likelihood of them sharing with other family members? Unless you've explicitly told others they can share the news, your coming out story is yours to tell.

To work colleagues or your manager

Being out at work could be potentially dangerous, especially if there are no protections that exist in your workplace. In mid-2020, the [Supreme Court made it illegal to be fired for one's sexual orientation or gender identity](#). This doesn't mean you can't [face discrimination for being LGBTQ](#). To gauge safety, check if your workplace has an active employee resource group for LGBTQ employees. If there are any already out LGBTQ+ people where you work, consider asking them about their experiences when they talk about their identity or family. Again, you don't have to be out to everyone you work with. Coming out at work is often part of expression and synchronization between your public and private self. If you feel more comfortable about not coming out at work, that's okay too.

Coming out on social media

Coming out on social media can be a great way to find community with fellow LGBTQ+ people. Surveys [show](#) that LGBT youth find their online friends more supportive, compared to non-LGBT youth. Finding your community could help you practice or navigate coming out to others. If you're going to come out on social media, think about what you feel comfortable with the world potentially knowing, on a timeline that might be out of your control. Also consider:

- who in your life already knows
- if your name and private information is attached to your profiles
- what you're comfortable with people online knowing

Many people are out on social media before they're out to people in their life, but remember that social media is public, even if you technically have a private profile with limitations or restrictions. For each new person who you let follow, you might want to repeat your needs. Let them know that in order to respect your privacy, they should not talk to people about what you post online. But there is always a risk that someone might intentionally or accidentally out you to someone else before you're ready. If someone does out you or share your identity, relationship, or pronouns without your consent, it's okay to feel whatever you feel. It's also within your right to remind them that your identity is not theirs to talk about.

Via text

If there are reactions you're hesitant about or you struggle with phrasing your words perfectly in person, coming out to someone by text may work best for you. Being able to type everything out and think about what you're saying before sending, might make you feel better. There's also less pressure to speak it out loud or answer questions right away. This also allows you to put down the phone if you need to breathe through the anxiety.

Via video call

Having a video call is a good way to have an in-person conversation without being in the same room. With a video you may be able to control the tone of your words better than text, but also consider that words may get lost because of signal issues. Video calls are also a great way to still see people's facial expressions. Unlike text-based communication, you'll be able to gauge their body language and tone right away. This might be the best way to come out to extended family or others in your life with whom you want a full conversation but aren't ready, or can't, to have in person.

Via email

The good thing about emails is you can send them to many people at once. If you just want to rip the band-aid off, you could write an email sharing news that you're transgender or non-binary, or that you've newly discovered you're a lesbian and send it to your whole family at once. But remember that someone might not see your email, or that they won't reply, which may cause more questions than answers. If you feel like you need a response, an email may create more stress on your end. If you do not care about their reaction, or believe their response will be harmful, email may be a good way to come out safely at a distance. You can always ask a close friend to read their response for you.

How to come out without making it a big deal

You might want to come out without actually saying anything. Or wish that people won't make a big deal of it. That's okay, too! If you're dating someone new and want to post about or talk about having a boyfriend or girlfriend without every announcing, "I'm gay!" or "I'm bi!", you can just refer to your partner in a way that affirms your identity. You can also start dressing in a new way that strays from traditional gender roles or affirms your trans-ness. You don't ever owe anyone an explanation about your identity and it's perfectly okay to come out subtly without shouting it to the world.

Make space to honor your emotions as well

Coming out can be terrifying at any age. If you're a young person still growing into yourself, having multiple identities, finding your peers while searching for acceptance and community can feel like a lot of work. If you're older, this process can also be the same, with the addition that coming out may upend very long relationships. These fears are completely normal. What shouldn't be accepted is people who decide to undermine your decision or identity in the process. During this stressful time find a community that will support you, accept you, and help you thrive. You can start:

- following LGBTQ+ social media pages, news outlets, and writers

- searching online for a local LGBTQ community center
- watching TikTok and YouTube videos made by people in the LGBTQ community talking about their own experiences

Online communities can be huge resources for acceptance, especially finding people who can validate and relate to what you're going through or thinking about.

Common questions you might want to prepare for:

- How long have you known?
- Are you sure?
- What does this mean?
- How can I support you?
- Are there words I should and should not use for you?
- What are your pronouns?

If you're coming out about your sexuality, reactions can vary. People who come out about being bisexual might face a lot of questions about what that means or confusion. Be prepared to talk about stereotypes, and how it just means that you like people of multiple genders and may want to explore those desires. If you're coming out as gay or a lesbian, people might have questions about who you're dating now or what that means for your future romantic life. Remember, you're not obligated to answer any questions you don't feel comfortable with and you also don't need to choose a label. You can simply say you're not straight, and not to imply future partner pronouns.

If you're coming out as transgender or non-binary, you may need to prepare answers to help people understand. If the people you're telling still hold stereotypes about what being trans or non-binary means, or don't know in the first place, it's good to be prepared to provide definitions and explanations so that people can know what this means for you. You could say, "I've been doing a lot of thinking and exploring my identity, and I've realized I'm _____. Here's what that means for me." Then you can tell them what language you want to be used for you, what makes you uncomfortable, and what your pronouns are, if they've changed.

It can be hard to be patient as people process new information. While you may have spent hours or years figuring out what to say or respond to people's questions, there will be some moments where others get tongue-tied. You might find that for some or many people, no one has come out to them before. This could mean that their silence is more about them, such as concerns around how to respond in a respectful and validating way. Allow them time to process if they need it by saying, "If this is a lot for you, I understand, and we don't need to talk about it right now. Let me know if you need some space to process and then we can find a time to talk more about it soon."

What if the person you've told didn't react positively?

While the hope is that the person you're telling accepts you and supports you, it's possible to experience negativity or hurtful reactions. If this happens, you can decide if you want to stay in that situation and have a conversation with them about it, or leave. You're never obligated to stay in an environment where someone is making you feel unsafe. If it's a phone or video call, you can say you're done talking about this now and hang up. If it's a text, you don't have to respond. No matter their response, know that you deserve to feel seen, heard, and respected.

Now you've come out, what happens next?

Know that your identity is your own, and you deserve to be able to control your own coming out. This might mean explicitly stating to people whether you're okay with them talking about your identity or life. If you aren't, be prepared with talking points to help them know what your boundaries are. Tell people this information is public or private. Let the people in your life know what you need in terms of emotional support. People accepting you is different from emotional support and providing the human connection you need. It's fine to ask for more support, such as frequent check-ins or accompaniment to certain events.

If you've just come out and you haven't gotten an affirming reaction from people in your life, let them know what would be affirming and helpful for you. Perhaps your friends have been supportive but not particularly enthusiastic, and you'd like more validation. In that case, it would be completely fine for you to ask for a coming out party. This is your life and

important step in your own self-identity. If your family has affirmed your identity but hasn't spoken about it more to you since, let them know if you want to have larger conversations about it, want them to read certain books or articles, or watch movies or videos that are important for them to better understand you and be there for you.

There are some false-positive statements to keep an eye out for. These statements may seem supportive, but ultimately still shame you for who you are.

For example, someone might say, "I don't care if you are bisexual, that's fine, just don't tell anyone else," or "It doesn't matter that you're trans, but maybe it's best if you don't come out to others." In response to these kinds of reactions, it's good to remember that you've decided to come out because you care and it's important to you. No one else gets to be in charge of your experience. If you feel comfortable telling them that their response is not supportive or belittling, you can tell them or end the conversation and leave the situation. Coming out doesn't mean you owe the other person all the answers. Remember, your timeline for coming out is entirely yours, and there is no "too slow" or "too quickly". The ways you choose to come out to people in your life might not be the ways you come out later. As said before, and it's always worth repeating, coming out isn't a "one and done" thing.

Gender and sexuality are both fluid. As you read and interact with the LGBTQ community, you may discover new things and people who encourage different sides of you to shine. You might work a job in the future where you feel much more comfortable and accepted coming out than where you are now, and the story you decided to tell then may differ from now. Labels can change and that's okay because whatever happens in the future doesn't mean your past is wrong or a lie. People grow and change and coming out is part of this growth journey.

Whatever your comfort zone is, remember coming out is not a requirement for anyone. "Coming out" has only become necessary [when a society oppresses people](#). Today, being "out" is part of personal expression, which can be healing and necessary for many people. This journey can also become a source of feeling pride and acceptance. All these feelings, which help counter feelings of oppression (although not oppression itself) [makes coming out worth it](#).

But if it isn't the right decision for you, or it only makes sense to be "out" to some people in your life, that's okay. You have the right to be able to keep whatever your identities are to yourself. The most important thing is often learning to accept yourself — and even that can be a lifelong journey.

Additional resources for self-validation and understanding:

[Recommended books for coming out](#)

[LGBTQ people share their coming out experiences](#)

[Supporting the Transgender People in Your Life: A Guide to Being a Good Ally](#)

[Coming out as transgender](#)

[Coming out when you're an adult](#)

[How to start exploring your identity and asking yourself questions](#)

[What it means to be non-binary](#)

In partnership,

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