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Coming Out

An OUTSaskatoon Resource

About OUTSaskatoon

OUTSaskatoon builds community for lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two spirit, intersex, and queer people. We provide peer support and counselling, queer-specific education and resources, outreach, social gatherings and events, community referrals, and sexual health services. We support body, mind and spirit within a growing and changing community.

A Note on language

People use many different words to self-identify their sexual/romantic orientation and/or gender identity. Some are more familiar such as lesbian or gay, while others are newer such as Two Spirit, transgender, non-binary, or pansexual. The list also grows and changes every day, so in this pamphlet we use LGBTQ2S to refer to lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, polysexual, asexual, genderqueer, transgender, intersex, Two Spirit, queer, and questioning individuals.

type of environment, you may want to search for a physician or care provider that accepts you and supports you in your journey. Before you come out in a long term care facility you may want to consider:

- Searching for symbols around an office or facility that indicate that you are in a positive space for LGBTQ2S individuals
- Taking note of inclusive language (or lack thereof) on intake forms
- Taking note of inclusive language used by nurses or physicians
- Reaching out to LGBTQ2S centers that may offer referrals to inclusive and safe care facilities
- Being sure to report any abuse, neglect, and/or harassment to Saskatchewan Senior Mechanism online or by calling Saskatoon Crisis Intervention at (306)933-6200.

The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code protects people from discrimination on the basis of 'sexual orientation' and 'gender identity and gender expression'.

Discrimination is unfair action taken against others because they belong to a certain group. It denies people benefits and opportunities that are necessary for a decent life, such as jobs or housing.

Coming out at work

Coming out in a work place can be difficult depending on where you work. It can be difficult to gauge how your co-workers will react. If you are worried about possible harassment, speak to the Human Rights officer about this concern and possibly request diversity and sensitivity training.

Final Thoughts

No matter who you are or how you identify, you have a right to be happy, safe, and fulfilled. Being LGBTQ2S is a wonderful thing and gives you a unique perspective on life and the world. And at the end of the day, it's your life and your choice how to live it!

Throughout it all, remember that **we are here for you!**

Coming Out To Yourself

Finding supports outside of school: Search out other people similar to you that can provide you with support and resources. A great way to find these resources is by attending a GSA (Gender and Sexual Diverse Alliance, or Gay Straight Alliance) meeting. Ask a trusted teacher if your school has a GSA where you can find friends to help you learn about yourself and to help you as you come out to your family and friends. If your school does not have a GSA, keep looking! There are support groups outside of your high school that may be a great place for you to find support.

Rainbow Coffee is a LGBTQ2S youth group at OUTSaskatoon that provides educational and social programming, as well as free supper! RC is for youth who are looking for community, friendship, and solidarity. Go to outsaskatoon.ca/youth for more information.

Coming Out As An Older Adult

Coming out of the closet as LGBTQ2S can be difficult, regardless of age. As an older adult there are many things in your life that might change how you go about coming out, and who you may choose to come out to. You may have to come out to spouses, children, relatives, friends, co-workers and others in your life. Some individuals who come out later in life may feel as if they are living a double life, so searching for supports in other places (community centers, LGBTQ2S accepting counselors) might minimize these feelings.

Coming out while being in a heterosexual marriage can have its own set of challenges. For some, a very real option may be divorce, but it is not always the solution for everyone. Some people choose to live together for financial reasons or they believe it is right for the children involved. But others feel that separating is a better option for health and well-being. These choices all depend on the individual, and no one's journey is the same.

Coming out in a long term care facility

Being LGBTQ2S in a long term care facility or congregate housing brings a different set of challenges. If you are living in, or planning to move in to this

What does it mean to come out?

Coming out, or coming out of the closet, describes a process of being open about one's sexual/romantic orientation and/or gender identity. Coming out may involve self-acceptance, openness, and a process of telling others about who you are. For some, the process takes a linear path, while for others it doesn't. In each case, coming out is a unique process, specific to each individual. This pamphlet is designed to guide you through your own coming out process with your family, loved ones, friends, co-workers, and yourself.

Coming out to yourself

An important step in the coming out process is coming out to yourself. Remember that everyone's journey is different, and that all kinds of people, regardless of age, mental health, physical health, culture, and religion can come out. Coming out can be difficult and it takes a lot of courage. Be sure to reach out to available supports and to look for resources that can help you explore your identity, build your understanding, and help you along your journey to acceptance.

A good place to start is to work through the following questions:

Try to be completely honest with your answers, this will help you face particular anxieties or fears you may have, as well as to recognize the supports that you might have around you.

- When did you start thinking of yourself as LGBTQ2S? What did the words mean for you then and what do they mean to you now?
- How long did it take for you to be comfortable with your sexuality/gender identity?
- Are there any local resources that you can access? Are they safe and easy to access? Do you have internet/phone access to make contact with individuals who can help?

When searching for resources and support, look to your surroundings. If you are in High School, possibly attend the Gay Straight Alliance/Gender and

Sexuality Alliance (GSA). If you are out of High School, you may be interested in searching for a local LGBTQ2S center to speak to people and get support and resources. If you have limited access to LGBTQ2S centers, try accessing online support groups or phone support lines. You can also check out resources at local libraries about LGBTQ2S identities.

Coming out is a difficult decision to make and only *you* will know the right time and process for yourself. You are in the best position to understand how others in your life are going to react to your coming out. Trust yourself.

Coming Out To Family & Friends

Everyone's reaction will be different

Most people will go through the phases covered in this resource while some may remain in one stage for a long time. Others may skip stages altogether.

A good place to start is to work through the following questions:

Again, try to be as honest as possible with your answers so that you can face anxieties and fears you may have, as well as recognize the supports that you might already have around you.

- Who in your family do you think would have the *hardest* time accepting your identity?
- Who in your family do you think would have the *easiest* time accepting your identity?
- In what ways would your relationship with your family change after you came out?
- What do you think the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or asexual mean to each member of your family? Your friends?
- Is there any risk that you may lose your job after you come out?
- Are any of your friends, family, or co-workers LGBTQ2S?
- Do you have anyone in your life you know would support you and help you come out to others?

OUTSaskatoon offers a number of programs and services to help people of all ages navigate the coming out process. If you need someone to talk to,

A good place to start is to work through the following questions:

- Do you have emotional support? (friends, relatives, teachers, a pastor) outside of your legal guardians?
- If there is a possibility of getting kicked out, cut off, or disowned, do you have another person you can rely on if this happens?
- Are you financially dependent on your family?
- Do you have any support in school or in groups outside of school?
- What kind of views does your family have about gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender people?

Your answers to these questions will help guide your first steps in the coming out process.

Coming out in High School

High School is a great time to explore your identity and see which labels you are most comfortable with using. You have a variety of people in your life to support you through exploring your identity, like your family, friends, and teachers.

Coming out in High School may be difficult. Trust yourself, and take as much time as you need to figure out who is safe to come out to and where you can find support within your school and community.

Where to look for support in your school: Try confiding in friends and teachers. A good place to start is by coming out to your most trusted friends first. Telling others will be easier when you have people that support you. You can also try confiding in accepting teachers and counselors. Look for a "safe space" sign in their classroom or a rainbow sticker or a pin that says they are an LGBTQ2S ally. These symbols indicate that they are committed to providing you with a listening ear and a safe space.

“ The first person I came out to was my best friend in high school. I was really nervous about what she would say when I told her. Her response to me was 'huh, OK'. And then she quietly whispered 'I think I'm gay too.' It was awesome. ”

- Rachel Ellen, BuzzFeed

Coming out as transgender will help you feel as though you no longer have to hide parts of yourself. You will be able to continue your journey with friends and family who accept and support the authentic you.

“ My mother and I have always had an intimate type of communication that is foreign to most... After nearly 32 years of intense denial and relentless attempts to change and hide, I accepted that I am transgender. The decision to transition was made, regardless of the potential consequences. How could I possibly communicate this to her? So, I did it in the only way I know how, by putting myself directly in front of her, as I now am, and let her read me. Face-to-face, she heard what I couldn't say. She said, 'Wow, you look like me.' And my heart gushed. ”

—Dee Kingsley, The Advocate

Coming out to guardian(s)

Sometimes the hardest people to come out to are the ones closest to us. Because of this, parents or guardians tend to be either the last people we come out to or the first people we come out to. Telling your family that you are LGBTQ2S can be very rewarding, but can also be a difficult process.

Before coming out to your guardians, consider initiating conversations around the topics of LGBTQ2S issues. Try watching a relevant movie or tv show with your guardians and then discussing it afterwards to gain some insight into how they will respond.

You may want to suggest that your guardians seek counseling. If they tell you to see a counselor, suggest that they match you session for session. Having an outside person to talk to is always a good idea. This may work for many family members, not just parents/guardians.

Coming Out as a Young Adult

Everyone faces different challenges and hurdles when coming out. As a young adult you may face challenges including coming out at school to teachers and peers, coming out to your co-workers, or coming out to your parents or guardians.

you, your guardians, or your friends can access peer counseling either over the phone or in person.

Stages of understanding

These five stages of understanding are pretty common, but there is no guarantee that your loved ones and friends will experience all of these reactions, nor that they will move through the stages at the same speed or in the same way.

1. Shock: Your loved ones may have no idea that you are LGBTQ2S, so your coming out might shock them. This is a natural reaction to new or unexpected information.

Occasionally, a loved one or friend will not be shocked at all. They may say, "I always knew you were different and I thought you might be LGBTQ2S. It's OK. I love you but I will need you to help me understand and accept this" or "We've known for a long time. We've been waiting for you to tell us." Telling them in these cases will be much easier because they will have already worked through some of the stages on their own.

“ I was going out to dinner with my dad and as we were going down the street I began with, 'There's something I need to tell you.' He said, 'I know, you're gay, ice cream for dessert?' ”
—heidij, BuzzFeed

2. Denial: Denial is a defense mechanism. It protects us from unknown situations. It is different from shock because it is a refusal to really hear what is being said. Denial can be expressed in a variety of ways:

Anger: "No kid of mine is going to be queer!"

Uncaring: "If that's what you choose, I don't want to hear about it."

Ignoring: "That's nice dear. What do you want for supper?"

Rejection: "It's just a phase; you'll grow out of it."

Your loved ones might think that being LGBTQ2S is not normal. You can explain to them that being heterosexual/cisgender might be the only identity they have been exposed to, but it's not the only one out there. In

fact, there are many, many other identities out there that don't often get talked about in larger society. Point out that not everyone is the same—some people are right-handed and others are left-handed.

3. Guilt: When guardians, friends, and loved ones feel guilty, they are focused on themselves, not on you. They may be too wrapped up in blaming themselves to see that you are happy or that you have new issues to deal with. You will need to be ready to teach them and to support them.

You can help them come to terms in a variety of ways:

- Education: Have a list of books and/or pamphlets that they can read or websites they can refer to. These allow them to learn in private, and at their own pace. For employers, co-workers, or friends, OUTSaskatoon also offers Queer 101 sessions.
- Supporting: Let them know that there are others they can talk to for support and help. There are supportive community organizations such as PFLAG (Parents, Family & Friends of Lesbians and Gays) and OUTSaskatoon, that can provide peer support counselling for both you and your loved ones.
- Connecting: You can encourage them to contact places like OUTSaskatoon for support. OUTSaskatoon can also put your loved ones in contact with PFLAG. PFLAG members have been through much of what your loved ones are going through and may be able to offer support and answer questions, parent to parent.

4. Expressing Feelings: When it's clear that guilt and self-blame are not productive, loved ones and friends may want to ask questions, hear the answers, and accept their feelings about the situation.

It may seem hateful and cruel at the time, but feeling angry and hurt are common feelings for them. Hang in there! Remember, once these feelings come up and your loved ones and friends deal with them, you will be able to move on because acceptance is closer now than it ever was before.

5. True acceptance: Some (but not all) guardians, family, friends, and loved ones get this far. When asked if they wish that their child, sibling, friend etc. were heterosexual/cisgender, they respond, "I'd wish that society was

more accepting of LGBTQ2S people." They will understand your struggle and now accept your identity as a whole.

“ I literally came out of the closet. I made a rainbow cake and made a tiny rainbow banner and hid in a closet. Then I had my sister (who already knew I was gay) bring my mom to the closet 'to get something off the top shelf'. So when my mom opened the door, I was standing in there with my cake that said, 'I'm gay!' and she gave me a hug and pretty much said she already knew and supported me 100%! ”

—Sarah Jane, BuzzFeed

Coming out as transgender

Coming out as transgender can be a very similar experience as coming out as anything on the sexual diversity spectrum. Everyone experiences coming out as transgender differently. There are a few key differences that may makes coming out as “T” different than coming out as “LGB”.

- They may accept the LGB but not the T: Individuals can be accepting of gay, lesbian, and bisexual identities, but not transgender identities. This may be due to a lack of knowledge about the trans community. Simply being educated on trans identities may help this.
- They may grieve: Loved ones may feel like they are experiencing a loss, and that they may lose you because of changes that may come with transitioning (hormones, name/pronoun changes, etc.). It may take some time for them to understand that you are the same person with the same hobbies, job, favourite movies, etc.
- Worrying about safety: Some loved ones may fear that you will face harassment or hate due to your identity. They may read or see about events on the news that make them worried about your safety and become overly protective.
- Thinking it's a phase: There may be some individuals that think that since being trans has frequently been in the media, that being transgender is a trend or a phase. This may also cause them to worry about things such as physically transitioning, or legally changing your name. Remind them that no one knows you better than yourself.