

NATIONAL COMING OUT DAY 2017

Coming Out Guide

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INTRODUCTION

The most important thing to remember is that coming out is an entirely personal and unique experience for all of us. If there's anything here that you don't think will be right for your situation, then that's okay! You know yourself and those around you better than this guide does, so go with what feels best and safest for you. If you need any help before, after, or during coming out, please feel free to contact the Association's welfare team (links at the end) or your college welfare team.

SHOULD I COME OUT?

You never have to come out if you don't want to or do not feel safe doing so. Some people don't think they should have to come out, and others wouldn't be safe if they did so. It is completely okay to feel this way; you do not need to feel pressured to come out just because other people might expect you to!

If you do want to come out, think about what impact coming out and not coming out would have on your life – for example, being able to introduce a partner or start medically transitioning.

Often, coming-out isn't just a one-time experience, either; you may want to come out to new people when you meet them. It is okay to pace yourself when it comes to telling people, just as it is okay to tell everyone at once! Do what feels best for you.

WHAT IF MY IDENTITY IS NOT WELL-KNOWN OR UNDERSTOOD?

It can be difficult to come out if you are coming out as an identity that people do not understand. However, you should never feel like you are wasting people's time by coming out; you deserve to be yourself, and you deserve to come out if that's what you need. You may not want to become an LGBT+ encyclopaedia, but at the same time it's possible that the person could get the wrong end of the stick about what you're trying to say. Therefore, it's important to think beforehand about what you are willing to talk about and what you are not. You may also want to ask the person to avoid asking questions until you are done speaking or until they have done their own research. Alternatively, you could give them some information to read themselves.

If you're struggling to find relevant resources, please feel free to contact your identity rep or the welfare team.

WHAT IF I'VE COME OUT BEFORE, BUT NO LONGER IDENTIFY THAT WAY?

Sometimes people can be worried about coming out for a second time as it might confuse loved ones. However, identity is fluid, as is our understanding of it! As in all cases of coming out, it is worth thinking about how you want to get your change of identity across, what responses you may want to refute before you get them, and what is most important for people to understand.

WHEN SHOULD I COME OUT?

This is up to you – come out whenever you're ready to, and whenever is a good time! If there are other things happening in your life that are taking your time and emotional energy, you may wish to wait until a calmer time. Coming out can be stressful, but staying in the closet can also be stressful, so do what feels right.

It's worth bearing in mind that the person you are coming out to may need time to talk to you, perhaps they may want to have a space to

process the information and do their own research before they speak about it with you, or maybe they'll need no time at all!

HOW DO I PREPARE FOR COMING OUT?

Coming out can be quite an emotional experience, and so it is important to prepare yourself. If you are getting anxious, it may be useful to imagine the best possible response, the worst possible response, and the response you're most likely to get.

You might find it helpful to test how LGBT+ friendly the person you are coming out to is before you come out. You could ask them about an LGBT+ rights issue (for example, the HB2 bill in the US) and see what they think, or mention an LGBT+ celebrity and how much you admire them.

If you are already out to someone you trust, you may want to tell them that you are coming out to someone else and ask them to support you.

HOW DO I COME OUT?

In whatever way you feel comfortable! The best way to come out can depend on who you want to tell, what you want to tell them, and how seriously you want them to take it. Here are a few examples of ways to come out, both directly and indirectly:

- Having a formal conversation
- Mentioning your partner or your gender in casual conversation
- Posting about your identity on social media
- Starting a conversation about LGBT+ people in the media or a current LGBT+ rights situation
- Talking about people you find attractive
- Writing a letter or email
- Asking them to go to Pride with you
- Beginning your transition and letting people ask questions if they wish to

WHAT MIGHT HAPPEN WHEN I COME OUT?

Coming out can have very different effects, both emotionally and practically. It's useful to bear in mind that your feelings are valid and it doesn't make you a bad person if any acceptance you gain doesn't make you feel immediately happier.

Make sure to practice lots of self-care and remember how brave you were to come out, even if it didn't seem to work or went an unexpected way. If possible, speak to a friend, family member, or a welfare officer about how you're feeling.

Practically, it is possible that coming out may lead to changes. It is possible that you will be treated negatively by the person you have come out to and this may affect your finances and/or housing situation. The association's welfare team and college welfare teams may be able to help you with this, so do not be afraid to reach out.

Whilst many people are afraid of overtly negative reactions, changes which are less obvious (both positive and negative) can happen. It may be that you become closer to the person now that you are not hiding yourself from them, or it may be that your relationship becomes strained. This can be a very confusing time for both parties involved, and it is okay to acknowledge this with them if you wish to; communication may help with any left-over confusion between the two of you.

You may also wish to make changes after coming out, for example changing your name by deed poll, changing the way you interact with your partner, and so on. As always, the Association is here to help you with any of these changes.

CONCLUSION

Thank you for taking the time to read this guide; we hope you found it useful! As we said in the beginning, coming out is a very personal decision, and you should do it (or not) in whatever way you feel comfortable. The LGBT+a exec and identity reps are always here if you want to speak about coming out experiences and possible ways of going about it. Whatever you decide, we're here to support you!

USEFUL INFO & LINKS

General Association email:
association@durhamlgbta.org.uk

Joe, Welfare Officer:
welfare@durhamlgbta.org.uk

Izzie, Assistant Welfare Officer:
assistant-welfare@durhamlgbta.org.uk

General Trans Campaign email:
transcomm@durhamlgbta.org.uk

Identity Representatives can be found here:
<http://www.durhamlgbta.org.uk/officers/ reps/>