

## Coming Out as LGBTQ

Coming out is a lifelong process whereby a person acknowledges a gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender/queer/questioning identity (GLBTQ) and shares this information with others. This process is considered lifelong because people in our culture are generally considered to be heterosexual or gender compliant unless they say differently; thus gay men, lesbians, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning persons continually “come out” to others throughout their lifetime. Coming out to oneself is a difficult, but important, part of developing a positive gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, queer or questioning identity. It requires introspection and exploration, as well as self-acceptance and self-appreciation. Coming out to others can be difficult and risky depending on a number of factors:

- Who it is that person is coming out to
- The level of power one has in the relationship
- The level of engagement with the person to whom they are coming out
- How accepting the person is of the person who is coming out

While this is an individualized process, there are some common experiences that members of the GLBTQ community may share:

- Questioning one’s own sexual orientation and/or gender identity
- Desire to live authentically and genuinely
- Concerns about whether or not to share this identity with others
- Concerns about how to share this identity with others
- Concerns about how others will respond
- Fear of being ostracized, abandoned, and/or rejected
- Fear of harassment or abuse in the forms of verbal insults to violence
- Loss of an important relationship
- Loss of financial support
- Loss of a job or important position

When a person decides to come out to others as GLBTQ, a plethora of emotions may be experienced:

- Fear
- Vulnerability
- Excitement
- Relief
- Pride
- Anxiety
- Shame
- Empowered
- Happiness

While those who have come out to themselves often have taken some time to integrate their GLBTQ identity, those to whom they come out typically are hearing the news for the first time. The people to whom a person comes out may experience any or a combination of the following:

- Shock
- Wonder
- Curiosity
- Discomfort
- Fear
- Uncertain what to say or how to react
- Anger
- Disgust
- Feel supportive
- Feel honored
- Skepticism that the person really is GLBTQ

While there are many reasons for coming out, what many GLBTQ identified persons want when they choose to come out to others may include:

- Acceptance
- Understanding
- Support
- To feel good about their identity
- Closer relationships
- Acknowledgment and validation of their feelings
- Honesty with others
- To live openly and authentically

To learn more, please visit any of the following helpful websites:

- **LGBTQ Student and Ally Discussion Group** <http://www.marquette.edu/counseling/events.shtml> - this discussion group is for students who are part of the LGBTQ community and their allies to discuss issues that are important to the LGBTQ community in a safe, confidential setting. For discussion are determined by the students who attend the group.
- **Division of Student Affairs LGBTQ Resources page** <http://www.marquette.edu/saffairs/LGBTQ/index.shtml> - this website is dedicated to LGBTQ resources on the Marquette University campus.
- **Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG)** [www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org) – this website is dedicated to promoting the health and well-being of the GLBT community, their parents, families, friends and allies through support, education, and advocacy
- **Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation** [www.glaad.org](http://www.glaad.org) – this website is dedicated to promoting representations of the GLBT community in the media that are fair, accurate, and inclusive in order to help eliminate homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity
- **GLBT National Help Center** [www.glnh.org](http://www.glnh.org) – this is a confidential and free telephone and internet hotline providing peer counseling, information and community resources for the GLBTQ community throughout the USA