



#COMINGOUTNEPA

COMING OUT IN THE WYOMING VALLEY

"SOMETIMES WE JUST NEED TO OPEN THE DOOR TO BE WHO WE WERE BORN TO BE."

-JACOB P. KELLEY

The following information is provided as a resource to help individuals learn more about what it means to "come out." Every person has their own experience when coming out and this page does not cover all experiences. However, we do hope it provides a basic understanding with helpful resources for knowledge and support.

#ComingOutNEPA

LGBTQA+ individuals discover, develop, and process their understanding of sexuality and gender which enables them to identify their sense of self. When a person discloses their gender identity or sexuality to others, this is referred to as "coming out." Coming out is an individual, personal, and unique process for all people within the LGBTQA+ community.

Why Someone Comes Out



A person is perceived and assumed to be cisgender and heterosexual from before they are born based on the cultural norms of a person's sex characteristics, such as their genitalia. There are expectations of a person who is assigned to a binary sex and gender at birth, such as being either male or female, to then be romantically and sexually attracted to the opposite sex. A person who is not cisgender or heterosexual will come out because they want to identify with their true gender and sexuality and not their assigned identities. A person should disclose their gender identity and sexuality to another person on their own terms.

Who Can Come Out

Gender identity and sexuality cannot be assumed based on a person's actions and appearance. To accurately know a person's gender and sexuality, they must tell you.



Non-cisgender Identities Non-heterosexual Sexualities

Transgender
Non-binary
Gender Queer
Agender
Gender Fluid
2 Spirited

Lesbian
Gay
Bisexual
Pansexual
Asexual
Queer

Gender identity and sexuality are separate identities that help a person express their sense of self. These two concepts can be independently understood on their own. Meaning a person's gender is not the same as a person's sexuality.

- Gender identity can be related to a person's cultural, emotional, and psychological reflection of how they internally view being masculine, feminine, androgynous, or gender-neutral.
- Sexuality is related to a person's emotional, sexual, and romantic attraction they may or may not have for other people.



Who Can a Person Come Out to

Coming out is an ongoing process and can frequently happen within a person's lifetime. A person's trust and support can be a defining factor in whether or not they choose to disclose their gender identity or sexuality. A person may come out when they feel safe and accepted.

Where a Person May Come Out and to Whom

This is a limited list to better understand where a person might come out and the variety of people they may come out to:



- Grade School (Teachers, Classmates, Peers)
- College (Roommates, Coaches, Faculty)
- Work (Boss, Coworkers, Clients, Customers)
- Family (Kids, Parents, Siblings, Cousins, Grandparents)
- Friendships (Best Friend, Acquaintances)
- Intimate Relationships (Spouse, Partners)
- Conferences (Audience, Stranger, Speaker)
- Church (Neighbor, Priest, Member)

How a Person May Come Out

Often, a person may question when the best time is to come out and what method is best to use. As always, this answer is based on an individual's perspective on how they see themselves coming out to another person. This could be based on their comfort and connection with who they are confiding in. The method a person chooses to disclose their gender identity and sexuality depends on their support, safety, and ability.



Methods of Coming Out



- Face to Face
- Social Media (Facebook, Instagram, Twitter)
- Text Message/ Facebook Messenger
- Email
- Artwork/ Performance
- Phone Call
- Video Chat

Tips for Coming Out

View our brochure with helpful tips regarding the coming out process. These tips are for people who may want to come out and if someone comes out to you. Download the brochure on our website:

<https://neparainbowalliance.org/comingout/>

Supporting a Person When They Come Out

When a person discloses their gender identity or sexuality to another person, many questions, thoughts, and feelings can arise. Remember the focus of the conversation should be on the person coming out and how you can support them. Here are a few ways to show support when a person comes out to you:



- Ask how you can support them, even if that is just letting them talk about their feelings.
- Listen to what they have to say, including anything they want to share with you i.e. a crush they have or uncertainties. Ask follow up questions to show your interest in what they have to say.
- Ask them their boundaries about sharing their identity. Is it a secret to others? When a person comes out to you, that doesn't mean they have come out to others.
- Research LGBTQA+ identities and hold yourself accountable for your own knowledge. It's ok if you don't understand something but make the effort to learn from reputable resources rather than always asking your LGBTQA+ loved one to be that resource for you. The emotional and mental labor can be a lot, especially when someone just came out. Be honest if you don't understand something and use appropriate language.
- Allow for an open dialogue and see if they are comfortable answering questions about their own identity.
- Lastly, let them know they can come to you about any feelings or thoughts that may come up afterwards.

Outing

Outing is disclosing a person's gender identity or sexuality to another person without their permission. This can happen both deliberately or accidentally.

- Outing a person can be harmful and dangerous because it violates a person's privacy. This state of vulnerability can lead to suicide or self-harm.
- Outing a person can put them at risk of being harassed, losing stability, being physically harmed, or even killed, depending on who is told.



Here are some forms of outing someone:

- Disclosing whom a person is dating without their permission.
- Posting a person's gender identity or sexuality on social media without their consent.
- Deadnaming a person (use of a birth name or other former name without consent).

Vulnerability



Coming out is a vulnerable time and moment regarding a person's identity. They confront their feelings of shame, guilt, and fear associated with their gender identity and sexual orientation.

- Fear is based on the understanding that the reaction from another person can lead to harm. After a person comes out, they can be harmed physically, verbally, or emotionally.
- Shame is an emotion that a person may feel because of their own lack of acceptance and understanding of the LGBTQA+ community.
- Guilt is based on a person going against the expectations of the people around them and their environment. A person can be made to feel guilty about being who they are.

LGBTQA+ Needs

Basic Needs

Food - Water - Shelter - Clothing

People who are LGBTQA+ are approximately 120% more likely to experience homelessness than non-LGBTQA+ individuals. LGBTQA+ individuals can be rejected from their family or be denied housing because of their gender identity or sexuality and become homeless. Many food banks, shelters, and clothing places may not be LGBTQA+ friendly, limiting LGBTQA+ individuals from accessing basic needs.



A resource to help with basic needs:
<https://www.211.org/pages/about>

Mental Health Needs

Substance Abuse - Counselor - Suicide Prevention



About 40% of LGBTQA+ individuals face rejection from family, friends, coworkers, and faith community members. Many people in the LGBTQA+ community deal with harassment and discrimination which can cause trauma. Individuals are 3 to 4 times more likely to engage in substance usage and abuse. LGBTQA+ individuals also have a high rate of suicide attempts because of a lack of acceptance and understanding from loved ones.

A resource to help find a counselor or therapist:
<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us>

Sexual Health Needs

STI testing - Condoms - HIV Support - PrEP

LGBTQA+ individuals are more likely to have higher rates of different health needs compared to non-LGBTQA+ individuals. Some of these needs are related to sexual health needs, with high numbers of STI and HIV rates. This is due to social and structural inequities, such as the stigma, discrimination, and lack of access to needed preventative supplies.



A resource to help with sexual health needs in NEPA:
<http://caringcommunitiespa.org/>

Legal Needs

Bullying - Discrimination - Assault - Harassment



LGBTQA+ individuals face homophobia, transphobia, biphobia, and other related prejudice and hate. About 38% of LGBTQA+ people experience discrimination in school and 52% in the workplace. LGBTQA+ people will experience discrimination in health care settings, school, work, and public areas like restaurants.

A resource to help with legal needs:
<https://www.matthewshepard.org/>

LGBTQA+ Resources

Here are websites that are meant to provide support, advocacy, and education for LGBTQA+ individuals:

- <https://www.glaad.org/resourcelist>
- <https://thesafezoneproject.com/resources/>
- <https://www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/>
- <https://www.aap.org/en-us/advocacy-and-policy/aap-health-initiatives/Pages/LGBT-Resources.aspx>
- <https://www.cdc.gov/lgbthealth/youth-resources.htm>



References

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<https://www.cdc.gov/.s-subtle-significant-ways/>
<https://truecolorsunited.org/our-issue/>
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<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4337813/>
<https://www.thetaskforce.org/why-outing-can-be-deadly/>
<https://www.glsen.org/activity/coming-out-resource-lgbtq-students>
https://www.thetrevorproject.org/trvr_support_center/coming-out/
<https://www.itspronouncedmetrosexual.com/2016/04/when-someone-comes-out-to-you-do-dont/>
<https://web.csulb.edu/colleges/chhs/safe-zone/coming-out/index.html>
<https://www.wearefamilycharleston.org/lgbt-glossary-az>
<https://www.nami.org/Your-Journey/Identity-and-Cultural-Dimensions/LGBTQI>

NEPA Rainbow Alliance -Thank You

We understand that it can be challenging to come out. Please know you are never alone. The NEPA Rainbow Alliance is always here to support, educate, and advocate for all members of the LGBTQA+ community. We're so proud of you for taking the time to visit us to learn more about this very important topic. For questions or comments, please reach out to us using the contact page on our website:

<https://neparainbowalliance.org/contact/>



About the Author Jacob P. Kelley - M.Ed.



Jacob P. Kelley is a Queer Inclusive Sex Educator with their Master of Human Sexuality Education from Widener University. A queer educator, Mx. Kelley is a current Ph.D. student studying Human Sexuality Philosophy and spent the last three years developing, learning, and creating content around LGBTQA+ inclusion. Mx. Kelley has presented at several conferences (LGBTQA+ Mid Atlantic Conference and Shining Together LGBTQA+ Summit) and presented at a variety of different universities and colleges such as Bloomsburg University and Penn State Mont Alto. Mx. Kelley is a local NEPA drag queen known as Trixy Valentine, the reigning Miss NEPA Pridefest 2019 and 2020, and has an online presence called Juicy with Jake. Follow on Facebook and Instagram @JacobKelleyQueerEducation.

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