

“Coming Out”

Gay Men’s Health Fact Sheet Series

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What is “Coming Out”?

The process of identifying and disclosing as gay is known as “coming out.” It is a self awareness and acceptance within a person that there exists an attraction for someone of the same sex. Some people try to keep their sexuality a secret, like hiding something in the closet. People who make the choice to stop hiding their sexual orientation have decided to “come out of the closet.”

“Coming out is experienced differently depending on personal situations.”

The Benefits of “Coming Out”

“Coming out” can increase self-esteem. In “coming out,” an important part of one’s life is shared. “Coming out” encourages healthy and honest relationships and affects positively the development of one’s mental and physical health. It helps promote connections with people who are gay-positive and

who can give support. Hiding feelings from those who are close can be stressful and affect mental and physical well-being.

How Does Someone “Come out”?

“Coming out” is a personal decision and is not always easy. Millions of gay men have come out to themselves and to others at work, school and home. While the process can sometimes be scary, most agree that by “coming out” a weight has been lifted from their shoulders. Relationships with family, friends and co-workers improved.

The first step is “coming out” to one’s self. It may be helpful to get more information on sexuality. There are many resources available on the subject. Some are found at the bottom of this page. Having a firm sense of and comfort with one’s own sexuality helps making healthy choices easier.

The second step is “coming out” to others. This part of the process may take longer, and can continue over a lifetime. There may be pressure from others to “come out” but there is no need to rush. Remember that “coming out” may change relationships with friends and family. It may take time for others to accept this news. Some people are very accepting while others find it hard to accept. Different people will have different reactions; fear, delight, joy, pain, grief and happiness to name a few. The person doing the “coming out” can control how the information is presented, but not how it will be reacted to.

“Coming out encourages healthy and honest relationships.”

“Coming out” is experienced differently depending on personal situations. People who come out in their youth are only beginning to establish themselves in the world. Older people who come out may have well-established lives. Both groups fear that “coming out” will disrupt relationships with friends and family at home, school and work. People of colour may experience “coming out” differently, depending on how their specific culture views homosexuality. This is also true for members of some religions. Knowing how receptive a community will be helps to determine how safe it is to “come out.”

Planning and timing are important when “coming out.” It is probably not a good idea to pick holidays, birthdays, or family celebrations. “Coming out” on a day filled with other events may bring unexpected reactions.

It may be wise to test how gay-friendly a circle of friends or family is before considering coming out to them.

Do they respond positively to subjects that concern gay people, or do they always put down gay people. Are they good listeners?

Remember, it is all about what feels most comfortable. Don't feel rushed.

For More Information About “Coming Out”

- Lesbian Gay BI Trans Youthline
<www.youthline.ca/comingout.html>
- AlterHeros
<www.alterheros.com>
- Avenue Community Centre
<www.avenucommunitycentre.ca>
- PFLAG Canada
<www.pflagcanada.ca>
- Canadian Rainbow Health Coalition
<www.rainbowhealth.ca>

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Funding for this publication was provided by the Public Health Agency of Canada. The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors/researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official views of the Public Health Agency of Canada.

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