

Coming Out As Bisexual: The Disclosure Kit

This Disclosure Kit is designed for bisexual women who want to tell our friends, family, or other people in our lives about our bisexuality. We hope that this kit will help us to get the social support we need from the people who matter most to us.

Coming out refers to choosing to tell others about our sexual orientation. Some people use the phrase to describe disclosing other types of information (such as political or religious affiliations).

Bisexuality generally refers to the potential to be attracted to people who are the same sex/gender as ourselves, as well as to people who have a different sex/gender. Some bi people understand their bisexuality differently, or use different labels to mean something similar. If you aren't sure how someone understands their bisexuality, it's best to ask them. This can be done through open-ended questions, such as, "How do you



define bisexuality for yourself?" or "What does being bi mean to you?"

Bisexuality is talked about less often than people talk about being gay or lesbian. Yet studies in Canada and the United States indicate that bisexual women outnumber lesbian women. In 2016, for example, a study found that 5.5% of women in the United States identify as bisexual and 1.3% identify as lesbian. This means that in the U.S., bisexuals account for 80% of sexual minority women. That same study found that half of all men who identify as a sexual minority person are bisexual.

Despite our relatively high numbers, bisexuality is often socially invisible, and bi people who come out to others may face stereotypes, stigma, or discrimination from both straight people and gay/lesbian people.

This Disclosure Kit has been prepared for you specifically.



Dear _____,

I identify as (check all that apply):

Bisexual (attracted to people of the same sex/gender as myself, as well as to people of other sexes/genders)

Pansexual (attracted to people of any sex/gender)

Fluid (attractions based on sex/gender may change over time)

I hope that coming out to you will:

I would like us to talk about this when you're ready.

Let's talk in person _____

Let's talk online _____

Let's talk over the phone _____

When bi women come out we are often asked a lot of questions. At this point in my coming out process I am comfortable talking about:

Please do not ask me about:

When someone comes out to you as bisexual, you may have questions about how being bi relates to their relationship history, previous identities, or to other aspects of their life. Take time to think about these questions, talk with supportive friends, or do some research to be better prepared for the conversation.

How you can support bisexual women who come out to you



Studies show that bisexual women receive less support from our friends, families, and communities than other women receive. When someone comes out to you as bi it can help to show your support in a number of ways.

Use friendly body language. Smile. Express your care the way you usually would, whether this is through a hug, a pat on the shoulder, or by holding their hand. You may also choose to express your feelings in other ways, such as by making a special or favourite food. Demonstrating that your opinion and treatment of them hasn't changed is a powerful way to show you care.

Affirm your connection to the person coming out. You might say something like:

"You're my daughter, and I love you."

"Our friendship means a lot to me."

"I want all my clients to feel comfortable being themselves in my office."

"This doesn't change how I feel about you."

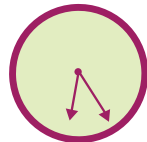
Express your appreciation for having been told. Telling the truth can be frightening, especially when our relationship with others feels like it is at risk. To show that you appreciate the person taking that risk, you might say something positive like:

"I'm glad you told me this. I love and support you."

"I appreciate the courage it took to tell me this."

"Thanks for sharing that with me. I'm glad we're the kind of friends who can tell each other things."

"It means a lot that you've shared this with me. How can I support you?"



What if I'm not feeling supportive yet?

Many bi people take time before feeling confident in our bisexual identity. You may also need time to adjust. If you've just learned about someone's bi identity and aren't sure how to respond, you might say something like:

"Thanks for telling me. I want to support you but am not sure how. I'd like to think about it and access some resources before we talk again."

"I'm glad you took the risk to share this. I'm having a lot of emotions and would like to sort through these so I can support you better. Let's meet next week."

"I don't know very much about this. Can you suggest ways I could learn more?"

“Our friendship is important to me. Please give me some time to adjust.”

Even if it’s difficult now, there’s a good chance that knowing this information will make your relationship stronger in time.

What Should I Avoid?

When someone comes out to you as bisexual it can help to avoid some common mistakes:

- Don’t assume that bisexuality is a phase. A decade-long study of women found that most who come out as bisexual keep that identity over time.
- Don’t assume that a woman’s bi identity tells you about her sex life. Bisexuality is about potential attractions, not sexual practices.
- Don’t assume that bisexual women are more sexual than everyone else. Being attracted to more than one gender doesn’t mean we’re attracted to everyone, and it doesn’t say anything about our level of interest in sexual relationships.

Taking care of yourself



You may experience a mix of emotions when someone comes out to you, but an open mind and heart can get you through. Think about the needs you might have as you process your thoughts and feelings.

Emotional support can help you figure out how you feel. Consider talking with a close friend, or someone else important to you, about your hopes and fears. Support can be obtained online or in-person.

I could get emotional support from:

Mental support can help clarify what you think, what you want to say, and how it may affect your relationships. Many people get mental support from friends, family, therapists, mentors, or elders.

I could get mental support from:

Physical support can help our bodies to feel less tense. This type of support can include activities that reduce stress, eating comforting food, and getting enough sleep. It can also include supportive touch, such as a hug from a friend, or being in comforting surroundings.

I could get physical support from:

Some people access spiritual support, such as a faith community, or a spiritual path. If spirituality is important to you, consider what resources can help you to be supportive of the bi people in your life.

I could get spiritual support from:

Resources



You may find it helpful to draw on resources for support.

PFLAG Canada is a national charitable organization founded by parents. They offer support and resources to help parents and other family members understand and accept their non-heterosexual children. www.pflagcanada.ca

Scarleteen is a sex-ed website for people in their teens and twenties. They have advice about coming out, including definitions of a number of sexual identity labels.

www.scarleteen.com/tags/coming_out



Rainbow Health Ontario works to promote the health of our lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and queer (LGBTQ) communities and to improve our access to health services. They produced a video series called “This Is Our Community,” about supporting bisexual people. These videos discuss bisexual people’s relationships with our parents, friends, partners, and health service providers. www.rainbowhealthontario.ca/bisexual-health/

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For more information about this disclosure kit and the research that led to it email Dr. Margaret Robinson at margaret.robinson@utoronto.ca.



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