

Coming Out Story

👤 Reflective 🕒 101 🔒 Medium Trust ⌚ 5 mins 📁 Sexuality

An experiment in empathizing with a hypothetical person's experiences, struggles, and setbacks with the lifelong process that is coming out.

⚙️ Necessary supplies

- Scrap paper
- Writing utensil

🚩 Goals & objectives

- Walk participants through a possible coming out experience of an LGBT person
- Demonstrate that coming out is not a one-time event
- Highlight a few of the possible social and legal ramifications of coming out

📋 Step-by-step walk through

1. Have participants write down their favorite / most important things in each category
2. Read the story, having them follow along with their lists
3. Process the exercise

Ask the participants to write down their responses to the following items in their packets. Explain that this is just for the purpose of the activity and shouldn't cause stress.

Write down your favorite or most important:

1. Person (friend / loved one)
2. Family Member / Relative
3. Hobby / Passion
4. Material Possession
5. Dream Job

Explain for the remainder of the activity, participants are to imagine they are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or pansexual -- and that if they identify this way already to just imagine they are in this specific queer person's shoes.



You try to explain that you are really in love with Batman. Then your friend calls you a fag and tells you he can't hang out with you anymore. Mark that person off your list.

Fast forward to high school. Your feelings of attraction to people of the same sex haven't gone away, and you've started to explore them secretly in relationships. You think, "It's the 21st century, my family loves me, I should be myself." You decide to tell your parents that you are dating someone, and that you are gay. They tell you that you're going through a phase and force you to break up with that person or find a new home to live in. You say it's not a phase, it's who you are, and they kick you out. Mark Number 2 off your list.

A little further down the road, you're in college now and life has gotten a little better. You've found a community of people to hang out with who support and care for you. They accept you for who you are. One day, you see a sign for a student organization meeting for that Number 3 thing on your list. You decide to check it out and go to a meeting. Afterwards, the president comes up to you and introduces himself. You start talking and he asks if he saw you in the gay pride parade on campus recently. You say yes and excitedly describe the event that you were involved with. He tells you that he respects your right to do what you want, but that members of the group wouldn't feel comfortable around you. He asks you not to come back. Mark Number 3 off your list.

After you leave the meeting, you come back to your room to find that "Die, Faggot!" has been written on your door and your room has been broken into. That Number 4 thing has been destroyed. Mark that off your list.

Finally, later in life, you've managed to get your ideal job and life is good. You're at work one day and have a picture of your partner and your child on your desk. Your boss walks by and asks about them. You tell them who they are and she says great and goes on her way. The next morning, you get called to a meeting where your boss tells you that the company is downsizing and they'll have to let you go. Mark that off your list.

Follow-up questions

Read: It's important to realize this is one person's possible experience. It's not meant to tell every LGBT person's story, or to say that all LGBT people lose all the things they love, and it's definitely not for you to be able to say you "know how this feels" now. This is a particularly tragic coming out story, BUT it's also not overly dramatic. These things DO happen. And we wanted you to try to experience empathy as a means of broadening your perspective.



What are your big takeaways from this activity?

- Coming out isn't a one-time thing (unless you're Ellen... and even then) -- it's a lifelong process, and a decision people have to make again and again in new situations
- There is a lot of risk in coming out, which is why many people choose not to (so don't be mad at a friend/family member when they come out because "why didn't you tell me before?")
- It's hard to predict how people will respond to someone coming out, and sometimes the

Make it your own

You can change the story as you like, by doing things like making the reactions more or less severe, highlighting different experiences, or even changing the list of important things.

You can also rewrite the story to switch between illustrations of homophobia to transphobia by making the story about a trans* person's coming out experiences. Think about what you believe would be more beneficial for the group you're working with, and modify the story to suit their needs.

Notes

It's **extremely** important that you drive home the point that this is one hypothetical individual's experience with coming out. It's not meant to represent every LGBTQ person's story, or to say that coming out is this bad for everyone, but to highlight many of the negative social and legal ramifications of coming out, and to make clear that coming out is not a one-time thing.