

Demystifying Coming Out

Large Group 101 Low Trust 5-10 mins LGBTQ

Necessary supplies

- Coming out handout

Goals & objectives

- To help participants gain a more nuanced understanding of the coming out process
- To provide some best practices (do's and don'ts) when supporting someone's coming out process

Step-by-step walk through

1. Pass out the coming out handout to participants.
2. Frame the activity/handout by sharing why it is important to talk about coming out. Example: "We are going to spend a few minutes talking about coming out. Coming out is likely something many of us have heard about, but may not have spent much time thinking about. Often times we don't think about the coming out process until we are going through our own coming out process or supporting someone in theirs. This handout is going to help us get a more nuanced understanding of what coming out means and ways to support someone in their coming out process."
3. Read the coming out handout. An easy way to do this (and to invite more folks to participate) is to ask participants to read a section of the handout which are clearly designated by change in color.
4. Once you've completed reading the handout, lead a short debrief on the handout (if you've allotted time to do so).
5. After the short discussion move into wrap up.

Debrief Question

What are some initial thoughts/reactions to what we just read in the handout.? Anything stand out to you?
Was there any information on the handout that was new to you?

Has anyone supported someone during the beginning of that person's coming out process? What did you learn from that experience?

How might this information be relevant to you in your role as a (insert professional/personal role here)?

Wrap Up

Summarize the major points of the discussion and/or highlight major outcomes you want to mention that have not been hit. May include:

- It is never okay to out someone (to reveal that they are LGBTQ without their permission)
- If you are supporting someone in their coming out process it is important for you to find out what they want you to do with the information they've shared—do they want you to share with others, keep it to yourself, check in with them regularly about it, etc.
- Everyone is going to want/need different things during their coming out process. Asking explicitly, "Hey, I'm so glad you shared this with me, how can I best support you in this process?" is a great question to ask.

Notes

The coming out handout can also be provided as a stand-alone resource and not explicitly built into the curriculum as an activity. While a helpful, quick, and easy activity, a lot of the information is communicated on the handout itself and can be read by participants at a later time.

The handout also works well as a transition/close to Privilege For Sale which opens up a discussion about the privileges that are at risk with being out or not out, the ways in which LGBTQ individuals choose to negotiate being out, and other fruitful discussions.

"COMING OUT" ... "of the closet." is the process by which someone...

1. Accepts and identifies with their gender identity and/or sexual orientation; and
2. Shares their identity willingly with others.

Sometimes We talk about coming out as if it were a one time thing. But for most folks coming out is a **series of decisions** – sometimes daily – that LGBTQ people navigate in every new setting they enter. (Most people aren't like Ellen, where they come out once and then the whole world knows.)

People may be "out" ⇨ in some spaces, and "in" ⇨ in others.

⇨/⇨ to Family ⇨/⇨ to Friends ⇨/⇨ to Classmates/Coworkers ⇨/⇨ to Religious Community

A decision to come out to a person or group is one of safety, comfort, trust, & readiness.

It's dangerous, unhealthy, and unhelpful to force someone to come out, or to "out" someone else (i.e., disclosing someone's gender identity or sexual orientation to others without the person's consent), **regardless of your intentions** (sometimes people think they're being helpful, or acting on the person's behalf to conquer their fears), **but...**

IF SOMEONE COMES OUT TO YOU...

DON'T:

1. Say "I always knew," or downplay the significance of their sharing with you.
2. Go tell everyone, bragging about your "new trans friend."
3. Forget that they are still the person you knew, befriended, or loved before.
4. Ask probing questions, or cross personal barriers you wouldn't have crossed earlier.
5. Assume you know why they came out to you.

DO:

1. Know this is a sign of huge trust! (Yay!)
2. Check-in on how confidential this is (Do other people know? Is this a secret?)
3. Remember that their gender/sexuality is just one dimension (of many) of who they are.
4. Show interest and curiosity about this part of them that they are sharing with you.
5. Ask them how you can best support them.