

Disclosing to Parents, Relatives, and Straight Family and Friends

When you begin to disclose your sexual orientation to non-gay people, your experiences will probably vary. Sometimes it will go well. Occasionally a relationship will be terminated abruptly or will fade away unexpectedly. From the experiences of many lesbians and gay men, their parents and friends, these are some suggestions about coming out to non-gay people. You should evaluate these suggestions in the light of your own personal situation and needs.

- 1) Be clear about your own feelings about being gay. If you are still dealing with a lot of guilt or depression, seek help in getting over that before you disclose to parents or non-gay people. If you are comfortable with your sexual orientation, those to whom you disclose will often see that fact and be aided in their own renewed acceptance of you.
- 2) Timing can be very important. Be aware of the health, mood, priorities, and problems of those with whom you would like to share your sexuality. The mid-life crisis of parents, the relationship problems of friends, the business concerns of employers and countless other factors over which you have no control can affect another's receptivity to your information.
- 3) Never disclose during an argument. Never use your sexuality as a weapon. Never encourage parents to feel guilty for having "caused" your sexual orientation – because they didn't.
- 4) When disclosing to parents or family, try to affirm mutual caring and love before launching into your announcement.
- 5) Be prepared that your revelation may surprise, anger, or upset other people at first. Try not to react angrily or defensively. Try to let other people be honest about their initial feelings even if they are negative. Remember that the initial reaction will not likely be long the long term one. Ultimately the individuals who have really faced and dealt with their homophobia may be far more supportive than those who give an immediate but superficial expression of support.
- 6) Emphasize that you are still the same person. You were gay yesterday and will be gay tomorrow. If you were responsible and caring yesterday, likewise you will be loving and responsible tomorrow.
- 7) Keep the lines of communication open with people after you disclose to them – even if their response is negative. Respond to their questions and remember that they are probably in the process of reexamining the myths and stereotypes about gay people which we all have learned from our culture.
- 8) Be sure that you are well informed about homosexuality. Read some books about the subject and share them with individuals to whom you disclose.
- 9) Encourage your parents or others to whom you disclose to meet some of your lesbian and gay friends.

For the LGBTQ Youth

- 10) Remember that it takes many gay men and lesbians a very long time to come to terms with their own sexuality and even longer to decide to share the fact with others. When you disclose to non-gay people, be prepared to give them time to adjust and to comprehend the new information about you. Don't expect immediate acceptance. Look for ongoing, caring dialogue.
- 11) If you are rejected by someone to whom you have disclosed, do not lose sight of your own self worth. Remember that your disclosure is a gift of sharing an important part of who you are. If rejection does come, consider whether the relationship was really worthwhile.
- 12) A casual or offhand approach often works best with work mates and relatives. Sometimes a confrontational situation can be avoided simply by being honest, in a conversational way, about whom you live and whom you date, and how you spend your leisure time. The other person is given a chance to recognize the circumstances of your life and to admit to your homosexuality without being obliged to make some immediate response on the issue.
- 13) Remember that the decision to disclose it yours. Don't be guilt-tripped into sharing by people who think that everyone must disclose. You can decide when, where, how, and to whom you wish to disclose. At this stage in our society, full public declarations about one's sexuality are not necessarily the best decision for all people.
- 14) Try not to let your family and close friends find out about your sexual orientation from third parties such as neighbors or the media. Try to tell them personally.
- 15) Whenever you disclose, reflect upon the experience and learn from it.
- 16) Never let yourself be pressured to disclose before you are ready.
- 17) Disclosure is one of the most difficult things a LGBTQ person may do in their lives. It won't always go well, but most of the time is a very freeing experience.