



5.7 Coming Out Advice, Strategies and Discussion

Suggested Grade Level: 8-12

Time: 30 Minutes

Subject Area: Coming Out, Student Resources

Overview:

Discuss what coming out means and what different ways of coming out are. The leader of the lesson will then offer up (if it did not come up naturally) the activity of letter writing as a way of coming out. Letter writing is commonly used as a way of coming out as trans, gender non-conforming, non-binary, etc. It allows the writer to put all of their thoughts together in a way that can not be interrupted, but asks all pieces be taken together. It is also a way of lessening the anxiety and burden on the writer to be able to articulate all their thoughts quickly and accurately in a conversation that can be adversarial.

Goals:

- Discuss what coming out is and how people choose to come out
- See example coming out letters
- Discuss the examples and/or make their own for practice

Materials:

- Ways to write a letter

Procedure:

Step One:

Open with discussions questions such as:

- What does it mean to come out?
- How do people come out?
- Do you need to come out to everyone?
- Does it make sense to come out to different people different ways?

Step Two:

The discussion leader brings up the idea of letters as a way of coming out and follows with a discussion with questions such as:

- What would a coming out letter look like?

- Who would you write a coming out letter to? Why?
- What advantages does a letter have over talking to someone directly about it?

Step Three:

The discussion leader projects or distributes the letters and advice for writing letters in one way or another

Step Four:

Allow the participants to write their own letter, talk amongst themselves, or otherwise process how they feel is productive

Dear Mom & Dad -

I want to share something about my life that is important because I love you. I am gay. I have only known this about myself since I was 25. In the years that have passed since then, keeping this a secret from you has become more and more of a burden. It has also placed an invisible wall between us in that I can not share with you much of what goes on in my life, something that straight children take for granted. I could not share the excitement of dating somebody new nor the pain when things didn't work out. I have spent many nights crying with a broken heart, alone, unable to call you for support.

I know that you may be feeling shocked, confused, angry, and sad; and perhaps you might feel that, somewhere along the way, you have failed as parents. From what I have read, these are common reactions. You have not failed as parents; you have both been wonderful. Nobody chooses to be gay and I accept myself and am happy with who I am. My friends have known for some time and they accept me as well. I hope that you will be happy for me.

Part of me thinks that you might have suspected for some time that I am gay since I never brought home girls while in school and I never talk about dating or women now. On the other hand, my being gay may have come as a complete surprise to you and you may need to take some time to get used to the idea. Hopefully, a few years from now, our relationship will be closer than it has been in the past. This is part of the reason I am coming out to you: to tear down the wall between us. When we speak on the phone and you ask me what is going on in my life and I say, "Nothing," I have been lying. I haven't been lying to deceive you, but because I could not tell you the truth. This lying has been eating at me for some time now and I'm tired of it. So this was the choice I had to make: either keep lying and allow us to grow even farther apart from each other, or tell the truth and hopefully have a better relationship in the long run.

I know you have always loved me very much. It was very hard to mail this letter for fear of losing that love. I have cried several times while writing it. Although you may not understand about being gay, I hope that you still love me now. Know that I am the same person now as I was before you read this letter; you just know one more thing about me. I am still "Paul Jay." When you are ready, you are welcome to call me so we can talk about this more.

Love,
Paul

*Source: http://www.bibble.org/gay/stories/comingout/coming_out_by_letter.html

Advice for Creating Your Own Letter

A letter has many advantages:

- It allows you to completely say all that you need to say without interruption,
- It allows you to sleep on and then revise your own words until you feel comfortable with them, and
- It is courteous to the person you're coming out to because it gives them the opportunity to read, reread, and have their own private reactions before having to respond to you.

Wondering about what to write? Here are some suggestions to get you started:

Be Confident. You know who you are. You are sharing this aspect of your identity with your loved ones, not asking for their permission to be your authentic self. Tell them how long you've known you were different and how you came to realize that trans*/genderqueer/etc. is the term that best communicates your identity. This can help them understand this is not a phase, an impulsive decision, or "teenage rebellion."

Be Respectful. You want your family members to treat you with respect and support, so show the same towards them. Remind them that you love them and want them to know the 'real' you. Respect that this might be new to them and they may have a lot to learn about gender identity before they fully understand.

Be Reassuring. Your family loves you and consequently, they worry about you. More often than not, parents' negative reactions come from being worried about you, your future, and your safety. Reassure family and friends that you are and will always be the same person inside, with the same interests, sense of humor, etc. Tell them that you will be okay and know you can still have a happy life that includes college, a career, a family, travel - anything you wanted for your future previously is still possible!

Be Simple. Trans* identities can seem completely foreign to many people. Telling your parents "I'm a genderqueer femme transfag" is probably too much for them to swallow in one go. Let them get used to the idea of "transgender" before you hit them with the nuances. Think of it this way: If you were a gay man coming out, would your family also need to know the various gay sub-culture groups (bear, leather, etc) you belong to? Probably not - at least not right away.

Be Yourself. The most important thing is to relax and just tell your story! Keep it personal and about you.

End your letter with action steps:

- What do you want or need from your family?
- If you got this resource from the "In a Bind" website, you probably want them to buy you a binder.

- You may also want them to start using a different name or pronouns for you. Let them know why these things are important to you.

**Modified from: <https://www.transactiveonline.org/inabind/comingout.php>*