



How to Navigate Coming Out as an LGBTQAI+ Adult at Work and Home

People come out at all ages and all stages of life. Coming out as queer is a very personal process, and it's important to remember that there is no set timeline—or deadline—for making this decision. Whether you come out at 15 or 50, your experience is valid and sharing your truth is an act of bravery. Keep reading to learn how to navigate coming out as an LGBTQ+ adult at work and in your personal life.

How to navigate coming out as LGBTQAI+ at work

People perform better at work when they can show up with their whole self and feel valued for who they are. Being “out” at work can reduce the stress of hiding who you are, improve your confidence, and help you form deeper connections with colleagues. It also helps ensure you receive the support you need from your employer.¹

All the above depend on whether a person feels safe at work. In 2020, the Supreme Court prohibited discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity.² Even with this protection, coming out can feel risky. The [Human Rights Campaign \(HRC\)](#)³ suggests asking the following questions as you decide whether to come out at work:

- Does your employer have a written non-discrimination policy? Does it specifically cover sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression? Does insurance cover domestic partner benefits? Does health coverage cover transitioning costs?
- Is there a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer employee resource group at your workplace?
- What's the overall climate in your workplace? Do people tend to make derogatory comments or jokes? Are any of your coworkers openly LGBTQ+?
- What are your work relationships like? Do people discuss their personal lives?
- Does your state or locality have a non-discrimination law including sexual orientation and gender identity/expression?⁴

There are a few ways to come out at work if and when you decide to. You can go through more formal channels by coming out to HR, your boss, or another manager you trust. This can help ensure that you get the proper protection and are provided with essential resources and [information regarding your employee benefits](#). You can request that anything you share with your company's leadership be confidential. This can help you get the support you need from your chain of command without disclosing your sexual or gender identity to your coworkers.

To come out to colleagues casually while still being direct, try weaving details like “my husband and I” or “the woman I'm dating” into everyday conversations. Or, if you want to feel things out first, you might mention a queer TV show or book you enjoyed to gauge the reaction before you officially come out.

Remember that you can take your time and come out at work in whatever way feels most comfortable to you. Everyone deserves a safe, supportive, and inclusive work environment. If you experience harassment or discrimination, notify HR immediately so they can help with the best course of action.

How to come out as an LGBTQAI+ adult to friends and family

Your family and friends make up a large part of your support system, so coming out can feel extra scary. The fear of rejection and abandonment is often more intense with people we love. But knowing that you are loved for who you are can strengthen your existing relationships and give you the courage to live fully as your most authentic self. This can help you create a supportive community of like-minded people. Here are some helpful tips to make it easier to come out to your family and friends:

Build up your queer support system. Coming out doesn't have to be lonely. Even before you're ready to tell your friends, family, or colleagues that you're LGBTQ+, there are ways to find support:

- [Chat with a trained LGBTQ+ peer support volunteer.](#)⁵
- Follow queer social media accounts for queer-affirming content.
- Read stories about other people who came out later in life.
- Ask a local LGBTQ+ community leader to connect you with discreet resources.
- Connect with a queer-affirming mental health counselor.

Practice what you'll say ahead of time. When you're coming out to people you're close to, it can be helpful to practice what you'd like to say ahead of time so you can feel more comfortable and prepared. You might even brainstorm how you'd like to come out to different people and what environment you'd be most comfortable in. For example, you may want to come out to a partner or spouse first and decide how to approach the conversation with children. Or you may want to come out to a sibling or close friend first and ask for their support while you tell your parents.

Be prepared to answer—or decline to answer—questions. When coming out as a queer adult to your family, there are likely to be questions about how your newly expressed identity affects them or the family dynamics. You can choose whether or not you want to answer questions. If you decide not to, it can be helpful to explain why and let them know if you're open to talking more about it later or in a different setting.

Understand that how someone reacts to you coming out has nothing to do with you. Even though an adverse reaction to your coming out will likely feel incredibly personal and hurtful, try to remember that it's not. When people react negatively to you sharing the truth about yourself, it's often a projection of their own fear or discomfort. Other people's emotions are not your responsibility, and it's not your job to help them understand or cope with their feelings. You can always remove yourself from a place or conversation that feels unsafe, uncomfortable, or unsupportive.

Be kind to yourself. Coming out may not go like you imagined it would. And dealing with other people's reactions to something so profoundly personal can trigger negative self-talk. Be kind and gentle with yourself, and remember that you're not alone.

There are risks to coming out. There are also many benefits, including the joy of knowing you're loved for exactly who you are and the comfort of having a community of people to lean on who truly understand you. Just like there is no right age for coming out, there's no right way to come out, either. Whether you're an adult coming out as LGBTQ+ at work or at home, the most important thing is that you feel safe and supported.

If you would like additional resources on LGBTQ+ support or if it would help to talk to an EAP counselor about your experiences, you can visit your member portal: <https://members.uprisehealth.com> or call us at 1-800-395-1616.

References

1. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-at-work>
2. <https://www.eeoc.gov/sexual-orientation-and-gender-identity-sogi-discrimination>
3. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out-at-work>
4. <https://www.hrc.org/resources/state-maps>
5. <https://www.lgbthotline.org/peer-chat.html>