



Being brave doesn't mean that you're not scared. It means that if you are scared, you do the thing you're afraid of anyway.

Coming out and living openly as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or as a straight-supportive person is an act of bravery and authenticity.

Whether it's for the first time ever, or for the first time today — coming out may be most important thing you will do all day.

**Talk about it.**

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There is no one right or wrong way to come out. It's a lifelong process of being ever more open and true with yourself and others — done in your own way and in your own time.



## WELCOME

**G**ay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans are sons and daughters, doctors and lawyers, teachers and construction workers. We serve in Congress, protect our country on the front lines and contribute to the well-being of the nation at every level.

In all that diversity, we have one thing in common: we each make deeply personal decisions to be open about who we are with ourselves and others — even when it isn't easy.

We express that openness by telling our friends, family, co-workers and even strangers that — among all the other things we are — we're also gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender.

In so doing, we meet a challenge that was handed to each of us at birth: to be honest about this aspect of our lives, even when it's hard; to talk with the people we care about, even when we don't know all the words.

Each of us meets this challenge in our own way and in our own time. Throughout the process of coming out and living ever more openly, you should always be in the driver's seat about how, where, when and with whom you choose to be open.

This guide was designed to help you through that process in realistic and practical terms. It acknowledges that the experience of coming out and living openly covers the full spectrum of human emotion — from fear to euphoria.

The Human Rights Campaign and its Coming Out Project hope this guide helps you meet the challenges and opportunities that living openly offers to each of us.

### **A Special Note:**

No resource can be fully applicable to every member of the GLBT community. Therefore, beyond this general guide, the HRC Coming Out Project offers other resources, including materials specifically designed for transgender people, African-Americans, Latinos/as and more. Visit [www.hrc.org/comingout](http://www.hrc.org/comingout) for additional information.



## BEING OPEN WITH YOURSELF

From birth, most of us are raised to think of ourselves as fitting into a certain mold. Our culture and our families teach us that we are “supposed” to be attracted to people of the opposite sex, and that boys and girls are supposed to look, act and feel certain ways.

Few of us were told we might fall in love with someone of the same sex, or that we might have a gender identity that differs from the body into which we were born. That’s why so many of us are scared, worried or confused when facing these truths.



“It’s those first five minutes in coming out to your friends or acquaintances that are really the hardest. But after that, things get better than before because there’s nothing standing in between you anymore.”

Opening up to the possibility that you may be gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or even just questioning means opening up to the idea that you’re on a path that’s your own. It’s also why coming out and living ever more openly is a profoundly liberating experience.

In the end, and at the beginning, the first person you have to be open with is yourself.

**Throughout the coming out process, it’s normal to feel:**

- Scared
- Vulnerable
- Exhilarated
- Proud
- Brave
- Confused
- Empowered
- Relieved
- Uncertain
- Affirmed

Talk about it.



## DECIDING TO TELL OTHERS

**M**ost people come out because, sooner or later, they can't stand hiding who they are anymore. They want their relationships to be stronger, richer, more fulfilling and authentic.

Once we do come out, most of us find that it feels far better to be open and honest than to conceal such an integral part of ourselves.

We also come to recognize that our personal decision to live openly helps break down barriers and stereotypes that have kept others in the closet. And in doing so, we make it easier for others to follow our example.

### The Benefits of Coming Out:

- Living an open and whole life.
- Developing closer, more genuine relationships.
- Building self-esteem from being known and loved for who we really are.
- Reducing the stress of hiding our identity.
- Connecting with others who are GLBT.
- Being part of a strong and vibrant community.
- Helping to dispel myths and stereotypes about who GLBT people are and what our lives are like.
- Becoming a role model for others.
- Making it easier for younger GLBT people who will follow in our footsteps.



"Admitting I was gay to myself took a long time. Once I was past that step, I realized that not everyone would accept me. But it's not about them. It's about me, living my life as the person I really am."

Along with these benefits, there are also risks. As constructive as the decision is, the reaction of others can be difficult or impossible to predict.





“Certainly, there was a wide spectrum of reactions — from warmly and accepting to cold and judgmental. But mostly, I was just projecting my own insecurities onto others.”

### **The Risks of Coming Out:**

- Not everyone will be understanding or accepting.
- Family, friends or co-workers may be shocked, confused or even hostile.
- Some relationships may permanently change.
- We may experience harassment or discrimination.
- Some young people, especially those under age 18, may be thrown out of their homes or lose financial support from parents.

### **You're in Charge:**

When you weigh the benefits and risks of being open about who you are, it's important to remember that the person in charge of your coming out journey is you. You decide who to confide in, when to do it and how. You also decide when coming out just may not be right, necessary or advisable.

### **Keep in Mind That:**

There is no one right or wrong way to come out or live openly. Choosing to come out or to be open does not mean you have to be out at all times or in all places — you decide how, where and when based on what's right for you.

Your sexual orientation and gender identity are important pieces of you, but they do not have to define you. Living openly doesn't change all the many unique things that make you, you.

Talk about it.



## MAKING A COMING OUT PLAN

**W**hen you're ready to tell that first person — or even those first few people — give yourself time to prepare. Think through your options and make a deliberate plan of who to approach, when and how. You may want to ask yourself the following questions:

### **What kind of signals are you getting?**

- You can get a sense of how accepting people will be by the things they say — or don't say — when GLBT-related issues come up. Try to bring them up yourself by talking about a GLBT-themed movie, TV character or news event. If a person's reactions are positive, chances are he or she will be more accepting of what you have to tell them.

### **Are you well informed about GLBT issues?**

- The reactions of others will most likely be based on a lifetime of misinformation, and in some cases even negative portrayals of GLBT people. If you've done some reading on the subject, you'll be prepared to answer their concerns and questions with reliable and accurate information. Helpful facts and frequently asked questions can be found later in this guide, and more information is available at [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org).

### **Do you know what it is you want to say?**

- Particularly at the beginning of the coming out process, many people are still answering tough questions for themselves and are not ready to identify as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. That's okay. Maybe you just want to tell someone that you're attracted to someone of the same sex, or that you feel uncomfortable with the expectations of cultural gender norms. Maybe you just want to tell someone about a new same-sex attraction, or that you're feeling that your true gender does not align with cultural "gender norms." Labels aren't important; your feelings are. Also, you may want to try writing out what you want to say, to help organize and express your thoughts clearly.



## Do you have support?

- You don't have to do this alone. A support system is an invaluable place to turn to for reassurance. Sources of support can be other GLBT people who are living openly, GLBT hotlines, school guidance counselors, a supportive member of the clergy or, if you are coming out for the second or third time, perhaps the first person you opened up to initially. A supportive mental health professional often helps people become more comfortable. In fact, these are the first people some of us come out to.



"Everyone needs to make their own decision about when to come out. For me, it's important that people I'm close to know about this important piece of me."

## Is this a good time?

- Timing can be very important. Be aware of the mood, priorities, stresses and problems of those to whom you would like to come out. Be aware that if they're dealing with their own major life concerns, they may not be able to respond constructively to yours.

## Can you be patient?

- Some people will need time to deal with this new information, just as it took time for many of us to come to terms with being GLBT. When you come out to others, be prepared to give them the time they need to adjust to what you've said. Rather than expect immediate understanding, try to establish an ongoing, caring dialogue.
- Remember, the whole reason you chose to be open with the person is that you care about them. If they react strongly, it's likely because they care about you as well. Keep that in mind as you navigate trying times.

Talk about it.



## HAVING THE CONVERSATIONS

**F**ostering strong, deep relationships with your friends and family begins with honesty. Living openly is important because it allows for closer relationships with the people you care about — and ultimately a happier life for you. For most people coming out or opening up to someone new starts with a conversation.

**It's normal to want or hope for positive reactions from the people you tell, including:**

- Acceptance
- Support
- Understanding
- Comfort
- Reassurance that your relationship won't be negatively affected
- Confidence that your relationship will be closer
- Acknowledgment of your feelings
- Love

All or some of these positive reactions can result from your coming out conversation, but they may not happen immediately. Putting yourself in the other person's shoes may also be helpful.

**A person who has just had someone come out to them often feels:**

- Surprised
- Honored
- Uncomfortable
- Scared
- Unsure how to react
- Supportive
- Disbelieving
- Relieved
- Curious
- Angry
- Anxious
- Unsure what to do next

Give the person you're telling the time they need. It may also be helpful to remember that the person you're really doing this for is you.

When you're ready to tell someone, consider starting with the person most likely to be supportive. This might be a friend, relative or teacher. Maybe you will tell this person that you are gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender. Maybe you will simply say that you have



questions about your sexual orientation or gender identity. Again, there is no right or wrong way to do this. You are the expert in knowing what's best for yourself and what you are feeling. When you are ready, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Find a relaxed, private place to have the conversation, and allow adequate time.
- People will usually take their cues from you in how to approach this — so be open and honest and say that it's okay to ask questions.

Appropriate and gentle humor can go a long way to easing anxiety for both you and the person you are speaking with.

### Telling Friends

When you're ready to come out to friends, you may be lucky enough to have some who are already out themselves, or who have a GLBT friend or relative of their own. Oftentimes, however, coming out to a friend can be a leap of faith. Here are some things you may want to consider:

- **Your friends may surprise you.** Those you thought would be least judgmental may be the first to turn away; those who seem least likely to be accepting sometimes offer the strongest support.
- **Don't assume prejudice.** Earlier we mentioned that signals can help indicate someone's level of support, or lack thereof. While that's true, it is just as possible to read too much into an off-the-cuff remark. Give your friends a chance to be supportive.
- **Provide resources.** The HRC Coming Out Project has resources for straight friends and family to help them understand and learn more. There are also a number of other organizations that provide similar tools listed in this guide.

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# THE COMING OUT CONTINUUM

Coming out and living openly aren't something you do once, or even for one year. It's a journey that we make every single day of our lives.

There are three broad stages that people move through on the coming out continuum. For each person it is a little different, and you may find that at times you move backward and forward through the phases all at once.

## Opening Up to Yourself

The period when your journey is beginning — when you're asking yourself questions, moving toward coming out to yourself and perhaps the decision to tell others.



The list goes on from there. For example, every time you go on vacation with a partner, you may be asked if you and your “friend” would like separate beds. You will then have a choice to make about whether or not you choose that moment to explain that this person is not your friend, but rather your partner or spouse.





### **Coming Out**

The period when you're actively talking for the first time about your sexual orientation or gender identity with family, friends, co-workers, classmates and other people in your life.

### **Living Openly**

The ongoing phase after you've initially talked with the people closest to you about your life as a GLBT person, and are now able to tell new people that come into your life fluidly — where and when it feels appropriate to you.

Whether it's proclaimed by a Human Rights Campaign sticker, a rainbow flag or a picture of a partner on your desk, there are a variety of ways that people incorporate coming out into everyday life so that they are able to live openly in a way that feels natural and comfortable.



## TELLING FAMILY MEMBERS

No matter what their age, many people are afraid their parents will reject them if they come out. The good news is that you're probably wrong. However, if you are under age 18 or financially dependent on your parents, consider this very, very carefully.

### Some reactions you may want to prepare for:

- Some parents may react in ways that hurt. They may cry, get angry or feel embarrassed.
- Some parents will feel honored and appreciate that you have entrusted them with an important piece of truth about yourself.
- Some parents will need to grieve the dreams they had for you, before they see the new, more genuine life you are building for yourself.
- They may ask where they “went wrong” or if they did something “to cause this.” Assure them that they did nothing wrong.
- Some may call being GLBT a sin, or attempt to send their child to a counselor or therapist in the baseless hope that they can “change.”
- Some parents will already know you're gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender — or they might have an inkling. They may have been waiting for you to tell them, and find your doing so a relief.
- It may take time for a parent to absorb or come to terms with the information. Good or bad, their initial reaction may not reflect their feelings over the long term.

Remember that your parents grew up in a time when some of the stereotypes about GLBT people were more prevalent than they are today. Remember, too, that they're probably trying to keep you safe from something they do not understand.

Finally, keep in mind this is big news, and there's no timetable for how long it takes parents to adjust.



”



“I came to understand that one of the biggest hang-ups was me. I was convinced everybody would have a horrible reaction to my coming out. But my parents were wonderful — as were many others.”



## LIVING OPENLY ON YOUR TERMS

As you continue to live openly, here are some other points to consider:

- It's important to remember that the journey from “Coming Out” to “Living Openly” is ongoing, and unfolds at your own pace.
- Living openly is something that becomes easier with time, it will often take a little energy when you tell someone new even after you've been open for years — but it gets exponentially easier with time.
- Living openly as a gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender or straight-supportive person can help to make it easier for young GLBT people who will follow this generation.
- Living openly can be a passive expression of who you are — such as not hiding a rainbow or equality sticker or a loved one's photograph — or it can be a deliberate process involving a planned conversation or the decision to always be ready to affirm your sexual orientation or gender identity should a situation arise.
- Living openly doesn't mean that the sole, or even primary, aspect of your identity is being GLBT. It means making this part of your life a natural piece of you — just like your age, height, hair color or personality.
- Living openly lets other people know, especially those who are judgmental or biased, that their attitudes are theirs alone.
- On a daily basis, you will face decisions about where, when and how to come out — or where, when and why not to. Always remember, this is your journey. You get to decide how to take it.





## TEN THINGS EVERY AMERICAN OUGHT TO KNOW

1 Same-sex couples live in 99.3 percent of all counties nationwide (2000 U.S. Census).

2 The federal government could save more than \$1 billion a year by allowing same-sex couples to marry (2004 Congressional Budget Office).

3 There are more than 1 million gay and lesbian veterans in the United States (Urban Institute).

4 Sixty-one percent of Americans believe the country needs laws protecting transgender individuals from discrimination (2002 HRC Foundation poll).

5 Nearly half of all Fortune 500 Companies offer domestic partner health benefits (2004 HRC State of the Workplace Report).

6 You can still be fired from your job in most states, simply for being GLBT, and have no legal recourse — because currently, no federal employment law includes GLBT Americans.

7 Eighty-four percent of GLBT students report being verbally harassed — name-calling, threats etc. — at school (GLSEN 2003).

8 There are at least 1 million children being raised by same-sex couples in the United States — and probably many more (2000 U.S. Census).

9 Hate crimes against GLBT Americans are on the rise, even as other violent crimes continue to decline (FBI Hate Crimes Statistics 2004). Current federal hate crime laws do not protect GLBT Americans.

10 In a national poll in 2006, 80 percent of Catholics said they agree with this statement: “Marriage is about love and commitment. Regardless of how I personally feel about gay people getting married, I don’t think it is my place to judge these people’s love for and commitment to each other.” (Accredited Research by Peter D. Hart & Associates)

Talk about it.



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual orientation and gender expression identity because it feels taboo, or because they're afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to help give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier and more comfortable.

**bisexual** – A person emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to both men and women, though not necessarily simultaneously; a bisexual person may not be equally attracted to both sexes, and the degree of attraction may vary as sexual identity develops over time.

**coming out** – The process in which a person first acknowledges, accepts and appreciates his or her sexual orientation or gender identity and begins to share that with others.

**gay** – A word describing a man or a woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to members of the same sex.

**gender expression** – How a person behaves, appears or presents him- or herself with regard to societal expectations of gender.

**gender identity** – The gender role that a person claims for him- or herself — which may or may not align with his or her physical gender.

**genderqueer** – A word people use to describe their own non-standard gender identity, or by those who do not conform to traditional gender norms.

**GLBT** – An acronym for “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender.”

**homophobia** – The fear and hatred of or discomfort with people who love and sexually desire are sexually attracted to members of the same sex.

**internalized homophobia** – Self-identification of societal stereotypes by a GLBT person, causing them to dislike and resent their sexual orientation or gender identity.

**lesbian** – A woman who is emotionally, romantically, sexually and relationally attracted to other women.

**living openly** – A state in which GLBT people are open with others about being GLBT how and when they choose to be.

**outing** – Exposing someone someone's sexual orientation as being gay, lesbian, bisexual or transgender to others, usually without their permission; in essence “outing” them from the closet.

**queer** – A term that is inclusive of people who are not heterosexual. For many GLBT people, the word has a negative connotation; however, many younger GLBT people are comfortable using it.



**same-gender loving** – A term some prefer to use instead of “gay” or “lesbian” to express attraction to and love of people of the same gender.

**sexual orientation** – An enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to another person; may be a same-sex orientation, opposite-sex orientation or a bisexual orientation.

**sexual preference** – What a person likes or prefers to do sexually; a conscious recognition or choice not to be confused with sexual orientation.

**straight supporter** – A person who supports and honors sexual diversity, acts accordingly to challenge homophobic remarks and behaviors and explores and understands these forms of bias within him- or herself.

**transgender** – A term describing a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most people expect. It is an umbrella term that includes people who are transsexual, cross-dressers or otherwise gender non-conforming.

**transphobia** – The fear and hatred of, or discomfort with, people whose gender identity or gender expression do not conform to cultural gender norms.

**transsexual** – A medical term describing people whose gender and sex do not line up, and who often seek medical treatment to bring their body and gender identity into alignment.



“The most important

thing you can do is come out.

People’s hearts have to change — and when a person meets someone gay, that more than anything seems to make them understand and take on new attitudes.”



## MYTHS & FACTS ABOUT GLBT PEOPLE

It's important to remember that most of the negative stereotypes of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people are based on erroneous or inadequate information. Here are some myths and facts to help you flesh out what's what:

**It's a "choice."** Sexual orientation and gender identity are not choices, any more than being left-handed or having brown eyes or being straight are choices. The choice is in deciding whether or not to live your life openly and honestly with yourself and others.

**It's a "lifestyle."** It's sometimes said that GLBT people live a gay "lifestyle." The problem with that word is that it can trivialize GLBT people and the struggles they face. Being GLBT is no more a lifestyle than being straight — it's a life, just like anyone else's.

**Same-sex relationships don't last.** Same-sex couples can, and do, form lasting, lifelong, committed relationships — just like any other couple. And just like any other couple, sometimes same-sex relationships end. The primary difference is that same-sex couples have few opportunities to marry or enter into civil unions or domestic partnerships.

**GLBT people can't have families.** According to the 2000 Census, more than 1 million children — probably many more — are being raised by same-sex couples nationwide. The American Psychological Association and other major medical and scientific researchers have stated that children of gay and lesbian parents are as mentally healthy as children raised by straight parents.

**GLBT people aren't happy.** In 1994, the American Medical Association released a statement saying, "Most of the emotional disturbance experienced by gay men and lesbians around their sexual identity is not based on physiological causes but rather is due more to a sense of alienation in an unaccepting environment." What that means is that the discrimination and stress that GLBT people face is the root cause of a great deal of pain for many GLBT people. That pain can be alleviated by knowing that there is a vibrant, growing community of GLBT and straight-supportive Americans who know and care about GLBT people and the issues they face.

**GLBT people can "change" or be "cured."** No scientifically valid evidence exists that shows that people can change their sexual orientation, although some people do repress it. The most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to change your sexual orientation as the process can actually be damaging.



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### NATIONAL GLBT ORGANIZATIONS

**American Veterans  
for Equal Rights**

[www.aver.us](http://www.aver.us)

**Astraea Lesbian  
Foundation for Justice**

212-529-8021

[www.astraea.org](http://www.astraea.org)

**Bisexual Resource Center**

617-424-9595

[www.biresource.org](http://www.biresource.org)

**Gay Asian Pacific  
Support Network**

213-368-6488

[www.gapsn.org](http://www.gapsn.org)

**Gay and Lesbian  
Medical Association**

415-255-4547

[www.glma.org](http://www.glma.org)

**Gay, Lesbian and Straight  
Education Network**

212-727-0135

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

**GenderPAC**

202-462-6610

[www.gpac.org](http://www.gpac.org)

**Human Rights Campaign**

202-628-4160

TTY 202/216-1572

[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

**Immigration Equality**

[www.immigrationequality.org](http://www.immigrationequality.org)

**Lambda Legal**

212-809-8585

[www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)

**National Association of  
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual &  
Transgender Community  
Centers**

202-639-6325

[www.lgbtcenters.org](http://www.lgbtcenters.org)

**National Association  
of People with AIDS**

202-898-0414

[www.napwa.org](http://www.napwa.org)

**National Black  
Justice Coalition**

[www.nbjcoalition.org](http://www.nbjcoalition.org)

**National Center  
for Lesbian Rights**

415-392-6257

[www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org)

**National Gay and Lesbian  
Task Force**

202-332-6483

TTY 202-332-6219

[www.ngltf.org](http://www.ngltf.org)

**National Minority  
AIDS Council**

202-483-6622

[www.nmac.org](http://www.nmac.org)

**National Transgender  
Advocacy Coalition**

[www.ntac.org](http://www.ntac.org)

**National Youth  
Advocacy Coalition**

800-541-6922

[www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org)

**Parents, Families and  
Friends of Lesbians  
and Gays**

202-467-8180

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

**Servicemembers Legal  
Defense Network**

202-328-3244

[www.sldn.org](http://www.sldn.org)



### RELIGIOUS ORGANIZATIONS

**Affirmation (Mormon)**

323-255-7251

[www.affirmation.org](http://www.affirmation.org)

**Affirmation  
(United Methodist)**

847-733-9590

[www.umaffirm.org](http://www.umaffirm.org)



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### **Al-Fatiha Foundation (Muslim)**

202-319-0898  
[www.al-fatiha.net](http://www.al-fatiha.net)

### **Association of Welcoming and Affirming Baptists**

508-226-1945  
[www.wabaptists.org](http://www.wabaptists.org)

### **Dignity/USA (Catholic)**

800-877-8797  
[www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org)

### **Emergence International (Christian Scientist)**

800-280-6653  
[www.emergence-international.org](http://www.emergence-international.org)

### **Evangelicals Concerned with Reconciliation**

206-621-8960  
[www.ecwr.org](http://www.ecwr.org)

### **Gay Buddhist Fellowship**

415-974-9878  
[www.gaybuddhist.org](http://www.gaybuddhist.org)

### **Integrity (Episcopalian)**

202-462-9193  
[www.integrityusa.org](http://www.integrityusa.org)

### **Lutherans Concerned**

[www.lcna.org](http://www.lcna.org)

### **More Light Presbyterians**

[www.mlp.org](http://www.mlp.org)

### **GLBT Concerns for Unitarian Universalists Association**

617-948-6475  
[www.uua.org/obgltc](http://www.uua.org/obgltc)

### **Rainbow Baptists**

[www.rainbowbaptists.org](http://www.rainbowbaptists.org)

### **SDA Kinship International (Seventh-Day Adventist)**

866-732-5677  
[www.sdakinship.org](http://www.sdakinship.org)

### **United Church of Christ Coalition for LGBT Concerns**

800-653-0799  
[www.ucccoalition.org](http://www.ucccoalition.org)

### **United Fellowship of Metropolitan Community Churches**

310-360-8640  
[www.ufmcc.com](http://www.ufmcc.com)

### **United Methodists of Color for a Fully Inclusive Church**

773-736-5526  
[www.umoc.org](http://www.umoc.org)

### **Unity Fellowship Church Movement (African-American)**

323-938-8322  
[www.unityfellowshipchurch.org](http://www.unityfellowshipchurch.org)

### **World Congress of Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender Jews**

202-452-7424  
[www.glbtejews.org](http://www.glbtejews.org)



## HOTLINES

**The Trevor Helpline**  
866-4-U-TREVOR

### **National Gay and Lesbian Youth Hotline**

800-347-TEEN (8336)

### **Gay and Lesbian National Hotline**

888-843-GLNH (4564)  
800-246-7743

### **CDC Information Line**

800-342-AIDS (2437)  
800-243-7889 (TTY)



## A MESSAGE FROM HRC PRESIDENT JOE SOLMONESE

Dear Friends,

**T**hank you for taking time to read and think about the Human Rights Campaign Coming Out Guide.



For me, coming out was initially a process that was daunting. But as I came out to more and more people I began to realize that most people were simply happy for me, and that despite the occasional difficulties, I could ultimately begin to live my life as the person I was truly meant to be. What was stressful at first, quickly became empowering.

More than anything else, I think the thing that drives each of us to come out is an intensely human desire to be known and loved authentically for who we are. That is something everyone can relate to — and something we should celebrate and honor in one another.

To those of you who are just starting your coming out journey — congratulations. You are entering a brave new part of your life where you will be able to more completely realize your dreams and potential. At times, it may be hard — but please know that there is a vital and vibrant community ready to help support and welcome you.

For those of you who have been living your lives openly, I hope that you will consider starting new conversations with friends and family about your life as a GLBT person — because, even one person at a time, that extra step is the most important thing each of us can do within our circles to help change hearts and minds.

Wherever you are on your journey, the Human Rights Campaign is ready to help you at home, at work, in your community and beyond by providing resources and tools to help create a more accepting and understanding world for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, which appears to read "Joe Solmonese". The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a light-colored background.

Joe Solmonese, HRC President



## HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN COMING OUT PROJECT

The HRC Coming Out Project is a program designed to help gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people come out and start living openly.

As coming out is a lifelong journey, the HRC Coming Out Project also helps GLBT people, as well as straight-supportive people, to live openly and talk about their support for equality at home, at work and in their communities each and every day.

In short, the HRC Coming Out Project's chief export into the world is open and respectful dialogue about the lives of GLBT Americans and their family and friends.

The project is an extension of National Coming Out Day — celebrated every October 11. The day was born out of the 1987 GLBT march on Washington, DC, where hundreds of thousands of Americans marched to support equal rights for GLBT Americans. Today, National Coming Out Day events are held in hundreds of cities across the country and around the world.

Visit [www.hrc.org/comingout](http://www.hrc.org/comingout) for more information.



A VERY SPECIAL THANKS to our contributors for so graciously sharing their experiences. Thanks also to those who generously agreed to let us use their pictures in this guide.

Also, we would like to thank the University of Louisville Center for LGBT Services for allowing us to adapt pieces of their "Safe Zone Project Manual" for this text.

For more copies of this guide, additional coming out resources or more information on the Human Rights Campaign and its Coming Out Project, please contact us at [www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org) or 1640 Rhode Island Ave, NW, Washington, DC 20036.