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Coming out to Parents, Relatives and Straight Friends

[Coming out](#) is a lifelong process. It is also a very brave and big decision. Here are some things to consider before coming out.

18 Things to Consider Before Coming Out:

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 coming out to parents or other non-gay people. If you are comfortable with your gayness, those to whom you come out to will often see that fact and be aided in their own renewed acceptance of you.
2. Timing can be very important in coming out. Be aware of the health, mood, priorities and problems of those with whom you would like to share your sexuality. The mid-life crisis's 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 come out during an argument. Never use coming out as a weapon. Never encourage parents to feel guilty for having "caused" your sexual orientation – because they didn't.
4. When coming out to parents or family, try to affirm mutual caring and love before launching into your announcement about your gay or lesbian life.
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 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 lines of communication open with people after you come out 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 good books about the subject and share them with individuals to whom you have come out.
9. Encourage your parents or others to whom you come out to meet some of your lesbian and gay friends.
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 come out 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 come out, do not lose sight of your own self worth. Remember that your coming out was a gift of sharing an important part of yourself which that person has chosen to reject. If rejection does come, consider whether the relationship was really worthwhile. Is any relationship so important that it must continue in an atmosphere of dishonesty and hiding? Was the person really your friend or simply the friend of someone he or she imagined you to be?
12. Remember also that the loss of a friend is not the end of the world. Coming-out decisions must be made cautiously, but integrity and self-respect are extremely important in the long run.
13. 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 with and 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 this issue.
14. Remember that the decision to come out is yours. Don't be guilt-tripped into it by people who think that everyone must come out or by snooping people who ask impertinent questions. You can usually decide when, where, how, and to whom you wish to come out. At this stage in our society, full public declarations about one's sexuality are not necessarily the best decision for most people.

15. Try not to let your family and close friends find out about your gayness from third parties such as neighbors or the media. Try to tell them personally beforehand.
16. Whenever you come out, reflect upon the experience and learn from it.
17. Never let yourself be pressured into coming out before you are ready.
18. Coming out is one the most difficult things we do in our lives. It won't always go well, but most of the time it is a very freeing experience.

Adapted from a pamphlet found on The Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual & Transsexual SIG of the National Capital Freenet, Ontario, Canada

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