

## coming out

Everybody's coming out experience is different. At the same time you can be sure there are people who have had a similar experience to your own. It is understandable that you might think you are the only thirteen year old/married woman/granddad who has ever felt this way but you will soon understand that while your experience may be unique to you there are people just like you thinking they are the only ones! Some people come out when they are in their teens, some in their twenties, others in their eighties. In fact it's never too early or too late to come out...

LGBT people of all ages make up approximately 10% of the population from ALL walks of life.

Coming out is a lifelong process. For many it can be very scary at the start and requires courage, for others it is easy. As time goes on most people find coming out is less difficult.

## coming out to yourself

On average there can be a five year time span between recognising attraction to members of the same sex and coming out, however people on average are coming out at a younger age than has previously been the case.

The process from realising your attraction to members of the same sex to the point where you accept it as part of yourself can be influenced by many factors: family, friends, where you live; positive and negative stereotypes, homophobia and self-acceptance.

Issues such as previous or existing laws, ignorance, difference and religious attitudes can make it difficult to accept your sexual orientation. It is important to understand that being lesbian, gay or bisexual (L, G or B) is, and always has been, a normal expression of human behaviour. Websites can be a good source of information, however they can also be fraught with bias so be careful.

Drop-in centres like LINC and Cork Gay Project in Cork can be a good source of support at this time. Check out [LGBT.ie](http://LGBT.ie) for nationwide supports.

Help lines are also an excellent source of support wherever you live. A support system is vital to help you deal with any difficulties you may have coming to terms with your sexual orientation.

See the back of this booklet for contact details.

## coming out to family and friends

Coming out to family members and close friends can often be the most difficult part of coming out for people. Even if you have accepted that your sexual orientation is just a part of who you are, you may be afraid that people close to you may reject you on the basis of your sexual orientation. This is an understandable fear, however for many the desire to be open and honest with friends and family is or becomes a greater driving force.

But individual experiences differ depending on your unique circumstances and the attitudes of the people in your life.

## coming out to your family

Remember how long it may have taken you to realise that you are L, G or B? When coming out to family it is good to remember this! Some people will immediately give you a positive response. If this is not the case, give people time to come to terms with it.

Parents may have had expectations for you which they now think may not be fulfilled. If you have children yourself, your parents may have concerns as to how this may impact them. Give them time to realise that you are still you.

Again it is a good time to access support services at this time. You can contact LINC, Cork Gay Project or the LGBT helpline if you need support during what can sometimes be a stressful process.

## coming out to your family when you live at home

If you live at home with family members the fear of rejection can be greater. Extreme negative reactions from family can have harmful consequences. Your safety comes first always!

It is important to have a good support network in place; friends you are out to or resource centres where you can get support through this difficult phase.

Always remember that their reaction is theirs - you are not responsible for how others feel about who you are.

## coming out as an on-going process

Some people describe coming out as a lifelong process and in a sense this is true. Society in general automatically assumes that people are heterosexual.

However as time progresses the manner and importance placed on coming out to others lessens. Talking about partners, books or films you like, LGBT events you may attend can all be considered in a sense 'coming out'.

## copng with negative reactions and homophobia

Embracing your sexual orientation as part of you is a positive step in ensuring your positive mental wellbeing. However experiencing homophobia, or negative reactions from others can be difficult to cope with. Homophobia is generally negative attitudes, hostility towards or fear of LGB people.

Building your own resilience to such experiences is important. Self acceptance and a good support system are two of the most valuable assets you can have in dealing with negative experiences. If you experience homophobia talk to someone - a friend, family member or community support worker at LINC or ring one of the helplines listed at the back of this booklet.

In the meantime, stay optimistic and take good care of yourself. Give yourself credit for having the courage to take the risks necessary to live your life honestly and openly.