



# COMING OUT

Guidance for Young People





## WHO IS THIS RESOURCE FOR?

Cara-Friend have compiled this resource to help you through the often difficult period of “coming out”. It is designed for anyone who identifies as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, questioning, queer or any other sexual orientation or gender identity.

Coming out is different for everyone. It can only happen when you are ready to talk about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Regardless of how others react to you coming out, what is important is that - **you came out for you.**

## WHAT IS QUESTIONING?

You may not be ready to come out because you are still questioning your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. All LGBTQ+ young people will go through questioning. How long this period lasts will depend on a number of factors. For example have you had a supportive or unsupportive family, peers, school, religious and social background? If your background has been supportive than your question period may be shorter than someone with an unsupportive environment.

There is no right amount of time to question your sexual orientation and/or gender identity. You will know and understand when the time is right for you. Do not put pressure on yourself or allow others to pressurise you into making decisions before you are ready. Questioning takes as long as you need it to. Allow yourself the time and space to ask those internal questions and find the answers that are right for you.



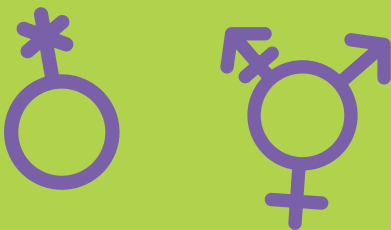


## WHAT IS COMING OUT?

Coming out is when you tell family, friends and/or others about your self identified sexual orientation and/or gender identity. Talking to others about something so personal can be difficult. That's why it's important to talk to someone who you really trust. Someone that you feel will understand where you are coming from, someone that will react in a positive and sensitive way. This may be your best friend, a family member, a youth worker or even a teacher.

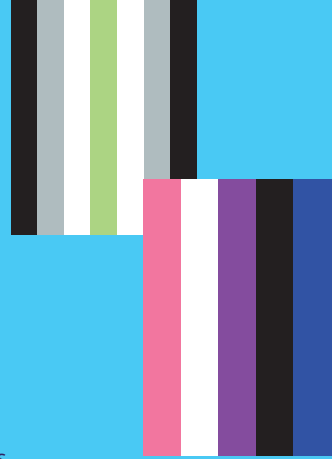
## HOW DO I KNOW I'M LGBTQ+?

Many in the LGBTQ+ community describe the feeling of just knowing who they are. All have gone through the questioning period to some degree and realised that they are not straight or cisgender. You will understand your sexual orientation because you understand who you are attracted to and who you see yourself being romantically involved with. You understand your gender identity because you know how you feel internally about your gender. It is a personal realisation of who you are and how you feel.



## WHEN SHOULD I COME OUT?

You should talk to someone when you feel you are ready and the time is right. Telling someone for the first time can be emotional and frightening. Saying the words "i'm trans" or "i'm gay" often do not come easy. You may have been waiting for a long time to say the words out loud. It can be a big moment in your life and one you will never forget. That is why you should talk to someone who you absolutely trust. Someone that knows you and who you think will understand.



## WHAT CAN I SAY?

Coming out does not have to be face to face. Often though this is how many people choose to come out, they can see a person's reaction and get immediate feedback. Others prefer to write letters or texts feeling they can better explain how they feel through the written word. How you come out is personal to you. There is no right or wrong way. Just be honest and open about how you feel.

I have something important to talk to you (both) about.

I've been thinking about it for a (while or long time) now.

This is not easy for me.

I have something I need to say.

I don't want this to affect our friendship, I don't know why it would.

I don't know how you'll react

I love you and I want you to know who I am.

I'm (Lesbian/  
Gay/Bisexual/  
Transgender)

### Here are some ideas to expand the conversation:

- Say how long you have been feeling this way.
- Talk about how good it feels to actually tell them.
- Tell them what it was like hiding or keeping this information locked inside - how it made you feel.
- Tell them who else knows and how they reacted.
- Invite them to ask questions.
- Tell them you want to be able to be open and honest with them in the future and to talk about how you all feel.
- Try not to get upset even if they say things like "it's just a phase" or "you're not gay/bi/trans" this show poor understanding - so try and help them understand by talking to them and telling them how you feel and educating them.



## HOW MIGHT PEOPLE REACT?

How someone reacts to you coming out is out of your hands, this is why choosing the right person to come out to is vitally important. Having a positive reaction will be deeply beneficial and affirm how you feel. A negative reaction is also possible and can be difficult to deal with especially if it comes from a loved one. It is important to remember that you coming out really isn't about the other person, it is about you being able to vocalise, perhaps for the first time, who you truly are.

## WILL I GET EMOTIONAL?

Never be afraid of showing your emotions, they help to emphasise how you are feeling. This is a huge moment in your life. Throughout your life you will come out time and again to countless people, they may be family members, friends, colleagues and even strangers. None of these experiences will ever compare to the first time you come out to someone. Coming out is potentially a highly emotional and personal experience and it is only natural to embrace your emotions.

Depending on the relationship a young person has with their family and friends, coming out may not necessarily be an overly emotional occasion. For some young people coming out is dropped into a conversation or talked about in a lighthearted manner. Regardless of how it happens, what you say, whether it is emotional or funny, your coming out experience belongs to you, there is no right or wrong way to do it.



**Whatever the reaction from others, good or otherwise, you can be proud of yourself.**



# HOW DO I COUNTER NEGATIVE COMMENTS?

Sometimes the people we choose to come out to make unhelpful negative comments which can be hurtful and difficult to counter. That is not to say that you should always expect negative comments. Here are some examples to counter three of the most commonly reported negative comments:

## “IT’S JUST A PHASE”

**Counter comment:** “I’ve been thinking about this and feeling this way for a long time now, it’s how I feel and I cannot change that. It’s therefore not a phase!”

## “YOU ARE TOO YOUNG TO MAKE A DECISION LIKE THAT”

**Counter comment:** “I’m actually not too young as most young people understand their sexual orientation at or around puberty, some can know well before that. Gender awareness occurs from 3/4 years and up, with most being able to speak clearly about their gender identity by 7/8 year old . So it is completely reasonable for me to know how I feel.”

## “YOU NEED MORE LIFE EXPERIENCE BEFORE YOU CAN BE SURE”

**Counter Comment:** “What age were you when you knew you were straight or what age were you when you realised you were male or female? How did you know you weren’t LGB or trans if you didn’t have more life experience? We all have an internal awareness of who we are.

Try to have informative and positive conversations and discussions. Often parents are not as well informed, so try educate them, it will help in their understanding of how you are feeling.

# DO I HAVE TO COME OUT?

You absolutely do not have to come out, there is no ticking clock or time frame to adhere to. It is your choice and you should only come out when you are ready to do so. Only tell people when you are ready. Take your time!

Coming out is different for everyone.

- I’m only out to myself.
- I’m out to my close friends.
- I’m out to some people in my family but not all.
- I’m not out at work.
- I’m not out to everyone but I go to Pride.
- I’m out to a few close friends but not my family.
- I’m out to everyone.



# SHOULD I COME OUT AT SCHOOL?

Most young people tend to come out to other young people first, before a parent or other adults. Telling someone you trust is important. Even though you have told someone your personal information, it is still your information and they should treat it as such. They should not tell other people without your permission and consent.

Some school environments are more accepting than others in Northern Ireland due to cultural and religious ethos. Having a few or more people, in a school setting, know something so personal can be challenging and even frightening. Ultimately it is your decision to tell others. If you feel ready to talk to friends and/or teachers about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity - go for it!

If you need to address issues such as toilet or changing facilities, uniform, preferred name and pronouns you can go to your schools pastoral care team. They should address these issues and help you feel more comfortable. If you feel your school is not addressing these issues contact Cara-Friend and we will contact the school on your behalf.

## WHERE CAN I GO FOR SUPPORT?

You are not alone! There is always someone to talk to, whether that is a friend or a family member, a teacher or a youth worker. All you have to do is choose someone you trust and feel most comfortable talking to.

Cara-Friend LGBTQ+ Youth groups are situated in locations across Northern Ireland. Our largest group is in Belfast with groups in the east and west of the province. If you would like to come along to a group please get in contact with us. These groups are safe spaces and provide an opportunity for young people to get to know each other in a fun and inclusive space.

Cara-Friend youth officers are also available to any young person for one to one support. They can help advise you about coming out and any worries you may have. So do get in contact. We are here to help.

## IN BRIEF:

-  **TAKE YOUR TIME**
-  **TELL SOMEONE YOU TRUST**
-  **BE OPEN**
-  **BE HONEST**
-  **YOU ARE NOT ALONE**

# Good Luck!

### SUPPORT ORGANISATIONS:

---

#### **Cara-Friend**

*Belfast:* (028) 2989 0202  
admin@cara-friend.org.uk  
www.cara-friend.org.uk

#### **Transgender NI**

0300 302 3202  
info@transgenderni.org.uk  
www.transgenderni.org.uk

#### **Sail NI - Trans Resource Centre**

(028) 9532 0023  
info@sailni.com  
www.sailni.com

#### **The Rainbow Project**

*Belfast:* (028) 9031 9030  
*Foyle:* (028) 7128 3030  
info@rainbow-project.org  
www.rainbow-project.org

---

Special thanks to staff and  
young people from the  
Cara-Friend youth groups.

Written in 2019 By: Jo McParland

