

What persons who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited and Questioning have been told about their identity . . . and what you should not say

The way in which a person who is Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender, Two-Spirited and Questioning (GLBTTQ) chooses to come out to others often reflects how she or he feels about their sexual orientation and/or gender identity. The more positive responses the person receives to their news, the more comfortable they will feel with their identity, and the easier it will become for them to come out to others in the future. How you react to their disclosure of their sexual orientation and/or gender identity can help them out of the closet -- or keep them in.

Things Not to Say:

- You're just going through a phase.
- You're just depressed.
- You're just confused.
- Maybe you can find a therapist who can help you get over this.
- It's just because you've never had a relationship with someone of the opposite sex.
- You can't be gay -- you've had relationships with people of the opposite sex.
- It's just because you haven't had the proper male/female role models.
- You can't be a lesbian -- you're too pretty!

Ways you can help when someone comes out to you:

- Remember that the person has not changed. They are still the same person you knew before; you just have more information about them than you did before. If you are shocked, don't let the shock lead you to view the person as suddenly different.
- Don't ask questions that would have been considered rude within the relationship before their disclosure.
- If you would like more information, ask in an honest and respectful way. If you show a genuine and respectful interest in their life, they will most likely appreciate it. Some good questions to ask are:
 - How long have you known you are GLBTTQ?
 - Has it been hard for you carrying this secret?
 - Is there some way I can help you?
 - Have I ever offended you unknowingly?
 - Are you seeing anyone special?
- Don't assume in advance that you know what it means for her or him to be GLBTTQ. Every person's experience is different.
- They may not necessarily want you to do anything. They may just need someone to listen.
- Consider it an honor that they have trusted you with this very personal information.
- Thank them for it.
- Clarify with them what level of confidentiality they expect from you. They may not want you tell anyone at all. They may be out to others and not be concerned with who finds out.
- If you don't understand something or have questions, remember that persons who are GLBTTQ often are willing to help you understand their life experiences.
- If you find yourself reacting negatively, remember that your feelings may change. Try to leave the door open for future communication.