



Coming Out – to yourself **Acceptance of your sexuality**

The Coming Out Process: This process is regarded as having roughly 5 stages of development. Not all LGBT people go through all five, and not everyone reaches the latter stages.

Stage 1: Sensitisation

This is when a person begins to realise they are different in terms of their sexuality. It can be triggered by anything, the most common of which is usually PUBERTY. In a recent survey, it was found that on average, males tend to realise this 'difference' around the age of 13, females at the age of 14 1/2. However, as puberty is progressing, many of those experiencing these feelings don't know what they are.

Stage 2: Confusion about Identity

The person begins to understand a bit more that their feelings are of attractions towards members of their own sex, either a class mate, best friend or even a tutor / youth worker. Unfortunately, the only input they have on homosexuality, and in most cases, the only time they actually put a 'label' on their feelings, is when they listen to their peers' own views. Many of these are often derogatory, partially through ignorance and partially through society teaching us that homosexuality is wrong. These views can be damaging to the person's self-esteem and sense of self-worth. It is usually, around here that thoughts of suicide begin to surface. Also in schools, teachers' views can be very impressive, unfortunately, they are not permitted to teach anything on homosexuality, but often enough their views are also derogatory – depending on who the teacher is, of course.

Stage 3: Assuming Identity

At this stage, the person, usually now fully understanding of their orientation, begins to embrace it as part of them. It is normally at this stage that a person seeks to 'come out', either to a best friend or to a family member. Some prefer to explore their sexuality beforehand, by searching for support groups, or just going onto the scene. During this stage, self-esteem may begin to build, but depending upon peoples' reactions to their 'coming out' it can also be blown to bits.

Stage 4: Commitment

This is the stage where the person takes on the 'gay' or 'lesbian' label and asserts their homosexuality. However, as it is now the most important thing to them, they over-assert it. This can usually be seen somewhere on the scene – those irritating scene queens you see, with tight tops and jeans, necklaces and bracelets, glittered hair etc. It may be the only way they have of exhibiting their true identity, as they could be in the closet the rest of the week!!

Stage 5: Synthesis

This is normally the stage where a person may decide to it's time to settle down. Maybe they have got themselves a boyfriend or girlfriend, and want to get seriously involved with them. Usually, the age for this is in the mid-late twenties, or early thirties. A decision may be made to come off the scene, usually because they feel that it doesn't offer them anything, or because they feel they don't need it anymore to feel good about themselves.

Some points:

- Some people hide in the closet because they need to survive, and maybe they just don't think they have the strength to 'out' themselves.
- Some turn to drink and drugs to keep up their strength – it can be tiring leading two lives. Either that or they need some form of escape because they just cannot cope anymore.
- Nature versus Nurture – who knows what makes you lgbt?
- It is not a mental or emotional problem – it's natural, normal and healthy!
- Internalised homophobia originates when a person learns to hate him or herself for being gay, so they project that hatred onto others who they know or think to be gay.
- 1 in 10 people are said to be LGBT.