

Recommended methods of coming out to parents

(based on *API - Things to consider before coming out*, by H. Kameya)

I have listened to many coming out stories at the Los Angeles PFLAG rap groups over more than 10 years. Because of the fear and anxiety involved in coming out, a variety of good and not-so-good coming out stories have been heard.

The Method:

The best coming out method I have heard is a face-to-face talk with a parent with the help of a tool: The tool is a letter that describes your life's journey and struggles in finding and accepting your sexual orientation. This tool can also be of use even if you have already come out.

The Rehearsal: Rehearsing the dialogue with supportive siblings or allies is recommended. It will help to provide a sense of self-confidence to help you to come out from a position of strength.

Sample dialogue: "Mom, could we talk for a few minutes? You've always wanted me to be honest, and I know you appreciate it when you can be a part of my life. I'd like to have you read this letter first before we talk." (The letter will allow her time to gather her thoughts before responding.)

At times, a parent might pressure you to come out, or might not want to first read your letter. Words such as "You've always wanted me to be honest..." will set the right mood and will let them know that you are disclosing information that you have given considerable thought. The letter will be helpful to get your message to them after they recover from shock of your coming out.

Other dialogue samples: "A parent once told me that his greatest wish for his kids was not wealth, but that they acquire the ability to cope with the ups and downs that are a normal part of life. Your love and acceptance of me as a person will give me the foundation I need to face the future. Mom/dad, you may or may not know, but I am not attracted to (gender). I am attracted to (gender)."

An older man (who felt that he should have come out much earlier) came out by asking his mother the question "Have you ever wondered whether I might be gay?"

Some people might still have strong negative reactions associated with the word "gay". The words "I am not attracted to women, but to men," might help them to be more objective.

Out of town parents: If your parents are not in the area, you can mail the letter, then follow-up with a phone call. Very likely, they will call you first!

The Letter:

The Letter can be an important tool in educating your parents and making them your allies. Writing the letter will also help clarify your thoughts and be helpful in your coming out.

Your letter should include the typical journey of self-discovery, i.e. the fear of realizing that you were "different", the daily fear of being 'outed' at school, the desire to change, the loneliness, self-hate, etc., whatever is applicable. (Most parents will be moved by such revelations.)

Your describing your painful or fearful experiences should make it obvious to your parents that you did not choose to be gay.

Non-English-speaking parents:

What if your parents are not English-speaking, and if you can't write "The Letter" in their language? Some alternatives are to get a trusted family friend and ally to be with you to translate your letter to them, or for them to translate your letter in written form for your parents.

EVEN IF YOU HAVE COME OUT EARLIER, A LETTER TO YOUR PARENTS CAN STILL BE OF GREAT VALUE:

If you came out some time ago and your parents are less than supportive, you could still benefit from a letter to them. The letter could be regarded as a 'state of a union' letter that acknowledges the difficulty they have experienced, followed by a recap of your journey, and a description of your vision of the future.

Example of a post-coming out letter:

"Dear Mom and Dad,

It's been 2 years since I told you that I was gay. I know it was difficult for you to understand and accept. It is probably still difficult for you to bring up the topic with me. I've brought over some books for you to read on the subject, but I don't know if you read them since you haven't said anything or asked any questions. I thought I'd write you a letter since I too have difficulties discussing my being gay with you.

As I mentioned when I came out, you didn't cause me to be gay, nor did I choose to be gay. I first realized that I might be gay when I was ___ years old. I recall the fear and worry that came over me, as I realized that I was different from everyone else. (Etc, etc.)

A lot has changed since the time I came out to you. Many churches and denominations have accepted the fact that sexual orientation is not a choice, and so they are welcoming gays and lesbians into their congregations, etc. My childhood friends and their parents are supportive. I am so glad that the world has changed so much, and that people are realizing the wide diversity of sexual orientation that exists.

The Awkward Silence:

Often, when people come out to parents, parents don't know what questions to ask. An awkward silence might follow. You could ask them some questions to help them reflect on the topic of sexual orientation:

- Dad/Mom, Do you recall ever having to make a choice on your sexual orientation?
- Do you ever recall at what age it was when you realized that you were straight? (Most straights have not given this a thought. They would first have to ask themselves: How did a young person know that he or she was straight?)

Be prepared with resource materials or a resource list.

The one-page *Basic Questions about Homosexuality* by API PFLAG and the Mt. Kisko Presbyterian Church's *Blue Book* (http://www.pcmk.org/blue_book.pdf) are recommended.

Religion: If religion is expected to be an issue, please contact apipflag@yahoo.com or sgvapipflag@gmail.com for resource materials on religion.