

The Coming Out Letter

A good method of coming out is a face-to-face talk with the help of a coming out letter. The letter might be 1-2 pages in length. A coming out letter can be helpful even after you have been out for a while, and can be used to improve relationships with your parents.

The coming out letter will

- force you to organize your thoughts
- make it obvious to parents that being gay is not a choice, after learning of your fear, loneliness, self-hate, etc.
- let them know that being gay was not because of something that they did
- open their minds on the subject of sexual orientation
- allow them to understand your pain and your fears which might encourage a protective and nurturing reaction
- provide an opportunity for you to express your feelings of love and appreciation of them, and your hope for the future.

Your coming out 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, the self-hate, and the fear of having to come out to them, whatever is applicable.

Many parents are moved by hearing of their child’s struggles that they knew nothing about. It can educate your parents and make them your allies.

Many LGBTs feel it easier to come out to their parents separately.

Rehearsing dialogue is important

Run through the dialogue with supportive siblings or allies. It will help boost your self-confidence and help you to come out from a position of strength.

An example:

“Mom, could we talk for a few minutes?”

“You’ve always wanted me to be honest, and I know you want to be part of my life as an adult. I’d like to have you read this letter first before we talk.”

Reading the letter first will provide her time to gather her thoughts before responding. Later, after the shock of disclosure has worn off, the letter will be helpful as she reads it again and is able to reflect on your journey.

Other LGBTs have used these thoughts in talking to their parents:

“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 this, but I am not attracted to (gender). I am attracted to (gender).”

Some parents might have strong negative reactions associated with the words “homosexual” or “gay”. The words “I am not attracted to women, but to men,” might help them to be more objective.

A man in his 40s came out by asking his mother while driving “Have you ever wondered whether I might be gay?” Some people opened the topic while in a car, perhaps feeling more comfortable when both parties are facing the same direction, vs. being face-to-face.

For parents who are out of town:

You can mail the letter, then follow-up with a phone call (*they might call you first!*)

For non-English-speaking parents:

What if your parents are not English-speaking, and if you can't write a coming out letter in their language? You could get a trusted family friend and ally to accompany you to translate your letter to them, or your friend could translate your letter in writing for your parents.

For those who came out earlier:

If you came out some time ago and your parents are less than supportive, you can still benefit from a letter to them. The post-coming out letter can acknowledge their discomfort and difficulty when you came out, followed by a recap of your painful journey. It could conclude with a hopeful vision of the future.

Example of a post-coming out letter:

"Dear Mom and Dad,

It's been 3 years since I told you that I was gay. I know it has been difficult for you to understand and accept my sexual orientation. I sense that it is still difficult for you to bring up the topic with me. I've brought over some books on the subject. 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 also 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, and having to keep it a secret. I feared being 'outed' at school. I wanted so much to change, and I struggled with feelings of self-hatred. Worst of all, I dreaded the thought of having to come out to you.

My hope is that we

The Awkward Silence:

Often, parents don't know what questions to ask after their child comes out.

An awkward silence might follow. To help them, you might ask some questions to help open their minds. For example:

- Dad/Mom, I know that being gay is not a choice. Do you ever recall ever having to make a choice on your sexual orientation?
- For 'straight' people, being like "everyone else" is a very natural feeling, so you might feel that this question is odd: When did you realize that you were straight?
- Parents of some gay friends have said that it was very, very, helpful to meet and talk to another parent of a gay child. If you wish to do so, I can arrange for that.

Resource Materials:

Be prepared with resource materials. A search will produce thousands of websites on the issue:

-The Mt. Kisko Presbyterian Church's Blue Book: www.pcmk.org/blue_book.pdf

-The one-page Basic Questions about Homosexuality by SGV API PFLAG

Religious resources: <http://www.hrc.org/issues/religion-faith>, www.gaychristian.net,
www.religioustolerance.org/, www.ucccoalition.org/, www.rmnetwork.org/,
www.FaithinAmerica.org, www.soulforce.org/, <http://johnshelbyspong.com/>

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