

A GUIDE TO COMING OUT

Your child, friend, family member or loved one may have recently shared with you that they are attracted to people of the same sex or that they feel the gender assigned to them at birth doesn't fit with who they are. They are not alone, around 11 per cent of Australians identify this way.

Whether they told you or if you found out by accident, sometimes people see it coming and other times they don't. Either way, you are probably feeling what many parents and families feel initially: shock, disbelief, fear, anger, grief or shame. You might be feeling alone in this, or that your world has been suddenly turned upside down. You might be doubting yourself, or full of questions.

Coming Out / Inviting In

If you happen to be straight or cis-gendered (not trans), you probably haven't needed to think about disclosing your identity because being heterosexual and cisgender describes the majority of people in our society. We live in a world where we tend to assume everyone is heterosexual and cisgender because the majority of people we know and meet identify that way. Because we don't expect our children, friends and family to *not* be heterosexual or cisgender, there is a need for them to then let us know.

For someone who is same-sex attracted or questioning their gender, the journey of exploring, accepting and expressing it, and sharing process with others can be much more complex and challenging. This is usually referred to as "coming out" or "coming out of the closet". For the person "coming out", this can be a scary and sometimes risky experience as they may have no idea how people will respond.

Some people find it more helpful to think of it being more like inviting people into their life. Who they "invite in" is up to them, a bit like making a guest list for a special party or gathering. This can help them feel more in control of the process, and less pressured to come out to everyone at once.

You might be currently feeling like you don't know your child, family member or, that they are a stranger, or that they have kept something from you all this time. That's completely natural. Remember that it takes courage to invite people in.

How can I support my child or loved one?

- Be proud they are brave enough to embark on this scary and necessary process – and trusts you enough to tell you about it. You have an opportunity to be closer, and more trusting and loving than ever.
- Recognise that it will take time for you to process what this means for you and for them
- Accept that your reactions and your expectations for your child, friend, family member are your own. They will be hoping for a positive response from you and regardless of what your reaction is, it will have an impact on them.
- It is important to respect their confidentiality and trust them to set the pace when it comes to telling others.
- When you are ready, do some reading, talk to others in your situation or get some support.