

## Coming Out

Coming out starts with the sometimes difficult, but often exhilarating, process of coming to terms with your sexuality – coming out to yourself.

The first step is recognising and accepting that you are sexually attracted to other men or women.

The next step might be deciding whether you want to label yourself as gay/lesbian or bisexual – how and whether to label yourself is a personal decision.

For some people, coming out to themselves is a relatively straightforward thing – but others may wrestle with conflicting ideas and confused feelings.

If you feel this way, the best thing to do is talk your feelings through with someone else. Bottling it all up won't do you any good. You may trust someone you know to listen without judging you and treat what you say in confidence. If so, talk to them. This could be a relative or friend, teacher or tutor, student adviser, youth worker or doctor – anyone you feel comfortable talking to.

You may feel happier with talking to a stranger who has some experience of helping young people struggling with their sexual feelings – through a lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans youth project, for instance. These are staffed by people who have been trained to listen without judging and help you.

Once you've accepted your sexuality, who, when and even whether you tell is your decision.

But if you don't tell people close to you about your feelings, you may be cutting them off from a very important part of your life, as well as making it unlikely that they will be able to give you the support you may need.

However, if your friends or family are very conservative or very religious or just plain anti-gay, you may decide that coming out to them would make your relationships very difficult.

Whatever we call ourselves and whoever we tell, the most important thing about coming out is that we accept our sexuality and feel happy with who we are.

It's your life, your body and your sexuality. Coming out is about getting things right for yourself!

Remember, coming out isn't something you only have to think about when you first accept that you are gay, lesbian or bisexual – often, we find ourselves coming out again and again, as we meet new people in new situations during our lives.