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Being brave doesn't mean that you're not scared. It means that if you are scared, you do the thing you're afraid of anyway.

Coming out and living openly as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or supportive straight person is an act of bravery and authenticity.

Whether it's for the first time ever, or for the first time today, coming out may be the most important thing you will do all day.

**Talk a**

Welcome

Being Open with Yourself

Deciding to Tell Others

Making a Comthers

# WELCOME

Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans are sons and daughters, doctors and lawyers, teachers and construction workers. We serve in Congress, protect our country on the front lines and contribute to the well-being of the nation at every level.

In all that diversity, we have one thing in common: We each make deeply personal decisions to be open about who we are with ourselves and others — even when it isn't easy.

We express that openness by telling our friends, family, co-workers and even strangers that — among all the other things we are — we're also lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.

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## BEING OPEN WITH YOURSELF

From birth, most of us are raised to think of ourselves as fitting into a certain mold. Our culture and our families teach us that we are “supposed” to be attracted to people of the opposite sex, and that boys and girls are supposed to look, act and feel certain ways.

Few of us were told we might fall in love with someone of the same sex, or that we might have a gender identity that differs from the body into which we were born. That’s why so many of us are scared, worried or confused when facing these truths.

Opening up to the possibility that you may be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or even just questioning means opening up to the idea that you’re on a path that’s your own. It’s also why coming out and living ever more openly is a profoundly liberating experience.

In the end, just as at the beginning, the first person you have to be open with is yourself.

Typical		Ideal	
■ Scared	■ Relieved	■ Scared	■ Relieved
■ Confused	■ Proud	■ Confused	■ Proud
■ Vulnerable	■ Uncertain	■ Vulnerable	■ Uncertain
■ Empowered	■ Brave	■ Empowered	■ Brave
■ Exhilarated	■ Affirmed	■ Exhilarated	■ Affirmed

## DECIDING TO TELL OTHERS

**M**ost people come out because, sooner or later, the

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- Not everyone will be understanding or accepting.
- Family, friends or co-workers may be shocked, confused or even hostile.
- Some relationships may permanently change.
- You may experience harassment or discrimination.
- Your physical safety may be at risk.
- Some young people, especially those under age 18, may be thrown out of their homes or lose financial support from their parents.

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When you weigh the benefits and risks of being open about who you are, it's important to remember that the person in charge of your coming out journey is you. You decide who to confide in, when to do it and how. You also decide when coming out just may

## MAKING A COMING OUT PLAN

**W**hen you're ready to tell that first person — or those first few people — give yourself time to prepare. Think through your options and make a deliberate plan of who to approach, when and how. You may want to ask yourself the following questions:

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- You can get a sense of how accepting people will be by the things they say — or don't say — when LGBT-related issues come up. Try to bring them up yourself by talking about an LGBT-themed movie, TV character or news event. If a person's reactions are positive, chances are he or she will be more accepting of what you have to tell them.

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- The reactions of others will most likely be based on misinformation, and in some cases, even negativity.



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Fostering strong, deep relationships with your friends and family begins with honesty. Living openly is important because it allows for closer relationships with the people you care about — and ultimately a happier life for you. For most people, coming out or opening up to someone new starts with a conversation.

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- Acceptance
- Support
- Understanding
- Comfort
- Reassurance that your relationship won't be negatively affected
- Confidence that your relationship will be closer
- Acknowledgment of your feelings
- Love

All or some of these positive reactions can result from your coming out conversation, but they may not happen immediately. Putting yourself in the other person's shoes may also be helpful.

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Again, there is no right or wrong way to do this. You are the expert in knowing what's best for yourself and what you are feeling. When you are ready, here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Find a relaxed, private place to have the conversation, and allow adequate time.
- Please, please, please, don't rush. Take your time. It's your life, and you're the expert.

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# THE COMING OUT CONTINUUM

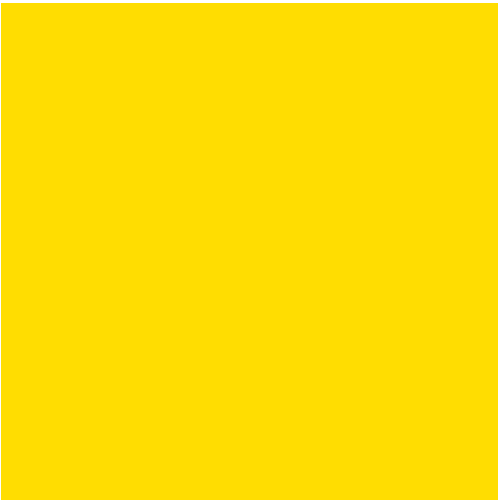
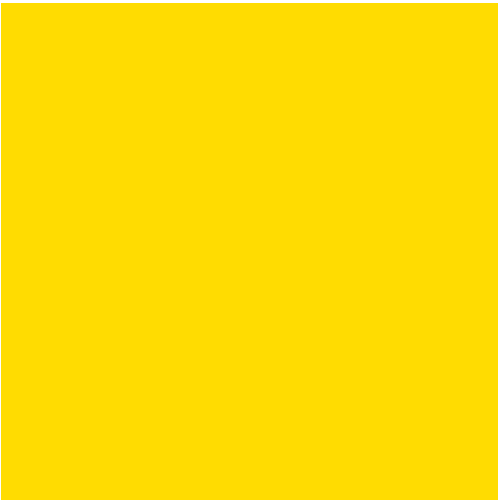
**C**oming out and living open





Whether it's proclaimed by a Human Rights Campaign sticker, a rainbow flag or a picture of a partner on your d







## LIVING OPENLY ON YOUR TERMS

As you continue to live openly, here are some other points to consider:

- It's important to remember that the journey from “Coming Out” to “Living Openly” is ongoing and unfolds at your own pace.
- Living openly is something that becomes easier with time. Even after you've been open for years, it will often take a little energy when you tell someone new — but it gets exponentially easier with each person you tell.
- Living openly as a lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or supportive straight person can help to make it easier for young LGBT people who will follow this generation.
- Living openly can be a passive expression of who you are — such as displaying a rainbow or equality sticker or a loved one's photograph — or it can be a deliberate process involving a planned conversation or the decision to always be ready to affirm your sexual orientation or gender identity should a situation arise.
- Living openly doesn't mean that the sole, or even primary, aspect of your identity is being LGBT. It means making this part of your life a natural piece of you — just like your age, height, hair color or personality.
- Living openly lets other people know, especially those who are judgmental or biased, that their attitudes are theirs alone.
- On a daily basis, you will face decisions about where, when and how to come out — or where, when and why not to. Always remember, this is your journey. You get to decide how to take it.



## TEN THINGS EVERY AMERICAN OUGHT TO KNOW

A CNN poll in August 2010 found that 53 percent of Americans support same-sex marriage. In 1996, when Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act, only 25 percent of Americans said that gay and lesbian couples should have the right to marry, according to an average of national polls. (*The New York Times*, August 22, 2010)

The federal government would save \$1 billion each year if same-sex couples could marry nationwide. (2004 Congressional Budget Office report)

Sixty-one percent of Americans believe the country needs laws protecting transgender individuals from discrimination. (2002 HRC Foundation poll)

The majority (57 percent) of Fortune 500 companies provide domestic partner health insurance benefits to their employees. (2010 HRC *Corporate Equality Index*)

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Many Americans refrain from talking about sexual

- A term that is inclusive of people who are not heterosexual. For some LGBT people & P



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[www.aver.us/aver](http://www.aver.us/aver)

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212-529-8021

[www.astraea.org](http://www.astraea.org)

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617-424-9595

[www.biresource.org](http://www.biresource.org)

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704-277-6710

[www.campuspride.org](http://www.campuspride.org)

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954-765-6024

[www.lgbtcenters.org](http://www.lgbtcenters.org)

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213-368-6488

[www.gapsn.org](http://www.gapsn.org)

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[www.glima.org](http://www.glima.org)

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212-727-0135

[www.glsen.org](http://www.glsen.org)

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202-628-4160

TTY 202-216-1572

[www.hrc.org](http://www.hrc.org)

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212-714-2904

[www.immigrationequality.org](http://www.immigrationequality.org)

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212-809-8585

[www.lambdalegal.org](http://www.lambdalegal.org)

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866-846-9366

[www.napwa.org](http://www.napwa.org)

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[www.nbjc.org](http://www.nbjc.org)

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415-392-6257

[www.nclrights.org](http://www.nclrights.org)

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202-903-0112

[www.transequality.org](http://www.transequality.org)

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[www.thetaskforce.org](http://www.thetaskforce.org)

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202-483-6622

[www.nmac.org](http://www.nmac.org)

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[www.ntac.org](http://www.ntac.org)

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800-541-6922

[www.nyacyouth.org](http://www.nyacyouth.org)

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202-467-8180

[www.pflag.org](http://www.pflag.org)

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Wabaptists  
240-515-8664  
[www.wabaptists.org](http://www.wabaptists.org)

Trinity  
612-343-2060  
[www.bmclgbt.org](http://www.bmclgbt.org)

Trinity  
415-351-2196  
[www.covnetpres.org](http://www.covnetpres.org)

Dignity  
800-877-8797  
[www.dignityusa.org](http://www.dignityusa.org)

Radically Inclusive  
415-861-6130  
[www.radicallyinclusive.com](http://www.radicallyinclusive.com)

Gay Baker  
fightback.org  
[fightback.org](http://fightback.org)

Galva 108  
www.galva108.org

Gay Buddhist  
www.gaybuddhist.org

Glad Alliance  
703-866-4628  
[www.gladalliance.org](http://www.gladalliance.org)

Integrity  
800-462-9498  
[www.integrityusa.org](http://www.integrityusa.org)

Trinity  
www.trinity.org

# A MESSAGE FROM HRC PRESIDENT JOE SOLMONESE

Dear Friends,

**T**hank you for taking time to read and think about the Human Rights Campaign's *A Resource Guide to Coming Out*.

For me, coming out w



The HRC Coming Out Project is a program designed to help lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people come out and start living openly.

As coming out is a lifelong journey, the HRC Coming Out Project also helps LGBT people, as well as su