



What You Need to Know About...

When a Student Tells You They Identify as LGBTQ

✓ *The very concept of coming out is an old, sad idea that “normal” is being straight, and everything else is LGBTQ. – From Reteaching Gender & Sexuality*

When someone comes out to you about their gender identity or sexual orientation, it means that they trust you. You have succeeded in creating an environment of safety and compassion for them to feel comfortable enough sharing that information with you.

In your personal life or career, these moments are special, and a continued effort should be made to help that student feel secure in their decision to come out to you. Take pride in knowing you have shown care and compassion in these moments!

Here are some more strategies to consider when someone in your school, family or community comes out to you.

1 Offer support but don't assume a student needs any help.

The student may be completely comfortable with their sexual orientation or gender identity and may not need any support or help dealing with it. It may be that the student just wanted to tell someone, or wanted you to know them better. Offer and be available to support your students as they come out to others.

2 Be a role model of acceptance.

Always model good behaviour by using inclusive language and by setting an accepting environment; do not make assumptions about students. Addressing stereotypes and myths about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBTQ) people also positions you as a positive role model. When you demonstrate that you are respectful of LGBTQ people and intolerant of homophobia and transphobia, LGBTQ students are more likely to see you as a supportive educator.

3 Appreciate the student's courage.

There is often a risk in telling someone something personal, especially sharing for the first time one's sexual orientation or gender identity, when it is generally not considered the norm. Consider someone's coming out as a gift and thank them for giving that gift to you. Sharing this personal information with you means that the student respects and trusts you.

4 Listen, listen, listen.

One of the best ways to support a student is to hear them out and let the student know you are there to listen. Coming out is a long process, and chances are you'll be approached again to discuss this process, as well as the challenges and the joys of being out at school.



Remember that gender identity is separate from sexual orientation.

Knowing someone is transgender does not provide you with any information about their sexual orientation.



Inclusive Greetings: These greetings can be used in a variety of contexts, with students, staff and community members! “Hello folks! How are **you all** doing today?” “OK students, please line up by the door!” “Please have a **guardian** sign these forms.” “**Distinguished guests**, welcome!”

“Coming out” is an individual process, and the community responses vary from person to person. Factors that may hinder people's choices to live their gender may be safety, comfort or acceptance, to name a few. A 2015 study from the University of British Columbia found that only 45% of youth aged 14 to 25, from across Canada, lived in their gender full-time*. Let's work every day to make a difference in that number.

www.flare.com/culture/what-its-really-like-to-be-young-and-trans-in-canada-now/

5 Assure and respect confidentiality.

The student told you, and may or may not be ready to tell others. Let the student know that the conversation is confidential and that you won't share the information with anyone else, unless they ask for your help. If they want others to know, doing it in their own way with their own timing is important.

6 Ask questions that demonstrate understanding, acceptance and compassion.

Some suggestions are:

- Have you been able to share this with others?
- Do you feel safe in school? Are you supported by the adults in your life?
- Do you need any help of any kind? Resources or someone to listen?

7 Remember that the student has not changed.

They are still the same person you knew before the disclosure; you just have more information about them, which might improve your relationship. Let the student know that you feel the same way about them as you always have, and that they are still the same person. If you are shocked, try not to let the surprise lead you to view or treat the student any differently.

8 Challenge traditional norms.

You may need to consider your own beliefs about sexual orientation, gender identity and gender roles and how these beliefs influence our school and work environments.

9 Be prepared to give a referral.

If there are questions you can't answer, or if the student does need some emotional support, be prepared to refer them to a sympathetic counsellor, a hotline, your school's Gay Straight Alliance, an LGBTQ youth group or community center.

See the *What You Need to Know About... Resources for Supporting Trans* and Gender Diverse Staff and Students in Our Schools* document for a list of resources in the KPR community.



We would like to acknowledge the work of the Gay, Lesbian, and Straight Education Network (GLSEN) for the research and resources they have made accessible. This document has been developed from GLSEN: Safe Space Kit at www.GLESN.org.



Student Well-being

If we can remember that this student is wishing to share their authentic self and what they need from the people around them to feel comfortable, our students have a better chance at achieving well-being in our schools and communities.

Avoid saying things like:

- **"I knew it!"** This makes the disclosure about you and not the student, and you might have been making an assumption based on stereotypes.
- **"Are you sure?" "You're just confused". "It's just a phase – it will pass".** This suggests that the student doesn't know who they are.
- **"You just haven't found a good woman yet" said to a male or "a good man yet" said to a female.** This assumes that everyone is straight or should be.
- **"You can't be gay – you've had relationships with people of the opposite sex."** This refers only to behaviour, while sexual orientation is about inner feelings.



* There are many terms that individuals use to identify their gender. In this document, trans* is an umbrella term that aims to include all gender identities that are not included in the mainstream gender binary (two-part definition) of male or female. "Trans" includes individuals who are Transgender, Gender Non-conforming, Gender Expansive, Gender Independent, Gender Queer, Gender Diverse, and more.