When a Friend Comes Out

We live in a society that often discriminates against people who are different. We have all been taught to believe that to be “straight” is to be normal and that there are only male and female with corresponding sexual and gender identity. This can cause a great deal of pain for LGBTQ people. “Coming out,” or disclosing their orientation to others, is an important step in LGBTQ people’s self-acceptance. Like everyone, LGBTQ people accept themselves better if others accept them.

Someone who is coming out feels close enough to you and trusts you sufficiently to be honest and risk losing you as a friend. It is difficult to know what to say and do to be a supportive friend to someone who has “come out” to you. Below are some suggestions you may wish to follow.

- Thank your friend for having the courage to tell you. Choosing you means they have a great deal of respect and trust in you.
- Don’t judge. If you have strong beliefs about homosexuality and/or the gender binary, keep them to yourself for now.
- Respect their confidentiality. They may not be ready to tell others right away and want to tell people in their own way.
- Let them know you still care about them, no matter what. The main fear for people coming out is that their friends and family will reject them.
- Don’t be too serious. S sensitively worded humor may ease the tension you are both probably feeling.
- Ask any questions you may have, but understand that they may not have all the answers. You can save some questions for later, or better yet, find some answers together.
- If applicable, include your friend’s partner in plans as much as you would with any other friend.
- Be prepared to include your friend in more of your plans. They may have lost the support of other friends and family, and your time and friendship will be even more precious to them.
- Be prepared for your friend to have mood swings. Coming out can be very traumatic. Anger and depression are common, especially if friends or family have trouble accepting them.
• Talk about other LGBTQ people you know. If your friend knows you have accepted someone else, they will feel more confident that you will accept them as well.

• Don’t allow your friend to become isolated. Let them know about organizations and places (such as the Pride Center) where they can meet other LGBTQ people or supportive allies.

• If your friend seems afraid about people knowing, there may be a good reason. People are sometimes attacked violently because they are perceived as LGBTQ. Sometimes people are discriminated against in such things as housing and employment. If your friend is discriminated against, you can help them in pursuing their rights.

• Don’t worry that your friend may have attractions or feelings you may not share. This can be worked through just as if someone of the opposite sex had feelings for you that you don’t share. Either way, it’s not worth losing a friend over.

• It’s never too late. If someone has come out to you before and you feel badly about how you handled it, you can always go back and try again.

Source: UCR LGBT Resource Center, modified by CSUN Positive Space Program, 10/09/2002. Updated by CSUN Pride Center 8/05/2013