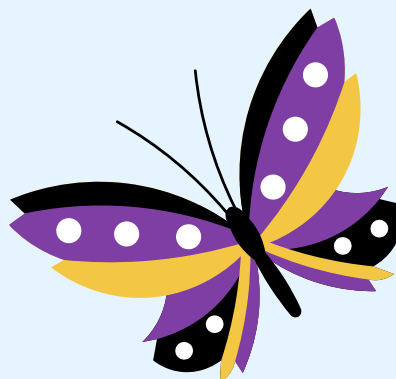
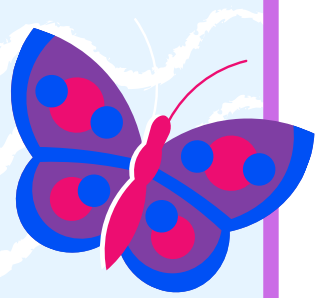


Front Cover

Contents

Contents.....	p. 2
Introduction.....	p. 3
Things to think about.....	p. 4
How to prepare.....	p. 5
Identity map.....	p. 6
Second chances.....	p. 7
Pride and shame.....	p. 8-9
Supporting others.....	p. 10-11
In school.....	p. 12
Community.....	p. 13
Family.....	p. 14
Our services.....	p. 15
Back Cover.....	p. 16



Introduction

The greatest myth about coming out is that you do it once. Coming out isn't just one big event - it's an ongoing process that gets easier with time.

There might be one coming out that is the scariest - perhaps to close friends and family - but you'll find that it keeps happening over and over. As we live in a world that assumes most people are heterosexual and cisgender, any identity or sexuality that deviates from that are therefore left to the LGBTQ+ person to inform others of. Ideally, we need to work on breaking down assumptions about others and ourselves until this isn't the case. But until that day, you'll probably find you have to come out multiple times, to multiple people, and every time with a different reaction.

The important thing then, is to focus not on the reaction, but on the process itself. Coming out is an assertion of facts, not an approval-seeking mission. You do not need to seek approval from others to be who you are. You deserve and are worthy of respect like everyone else. And this happens on your time-scale. Remember we always have choices, and it's absolutely fine to not come out, or to not be ready to come out. Sometimes it's not a safe choice to make. If you're here, it's probably to look for support with that process, or to learn more about how to support someone in that process. Either way, this guide isn't going to show you the perfect way to come out. It's a toolkit for reflection - take what is relevant to you, and leave the rest. Lets get started.

"Only by speaking out can we create lasting change. And that change begins with coming out."

- Dashanne Stokes

Things to think about

TIME

Coming to terms with your own gender and sexuality takes time. It takes others that same amount of time, too. While the 'coming out' is the conversation you might be most afraid of, remember there will be many more after this point, and they might improve over time.

SUPPORT

We all need peers to relate to, people who have gone through the same experiences we have gone through. Finding LGBTQ+ community can be helpful during the coming out process. It can be a relief to know we are not alone. Community looks different to everyone, so you might want to seek it out if it's something you don't have, or you might want to just connect with other media depictions and stories of LGBTQ+ people and characters. Try seeing if your school has an LGBTQ+ group, or look at the BLAH Youth groups we run.

SPACE

What space are you coming out in? A digital one? Is it in person or at a distance? Space can be important, because we all need time and space to process news. You might want to leave some space between coming out and answering any questions. Don't feel obliged to share more than you feel comfortable with after coming out. Consider the space that works for you, and the amount of time/distance you want between coming out and talking about it. Maybe long-distance helps with the time to process, or maybe you'll find that coming out in-person helps have a real conversation about it. It's up to you.



How to prepare

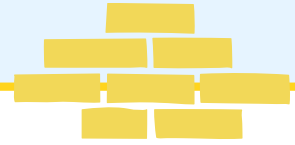
CONNECT WITH OTHERS

You are part of a long-long line of LGBTQ+ people having similar feelings and anxieties as you are now! There are so many great coming out stories you can read online, on youtube, in books & podcasts. You might have out friends or family members to ask about it. Everyone out who you admire at some point was where you are at now. Find stories that give you hope & encouragement.



START SMALL

You might want to start by telling those closest to you who you feel pretty sure will have a positive reaction. Identify a friend or family member who you think it might be easier to talk to. Once you've done it once, you know you can do it again. Build up to telling the people you're most concerned about.



NO PRESSURE

There isn't any 'right' way to come out, just what's right for you. Avoid putting extra pressure on yourself to come out at a certain time- if you don't feel ready, you can wait. There will be other opportunities. You are in charge here.



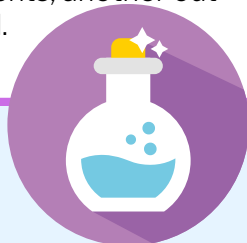
PHONE A FRIEND

Once you've come out to those who see you for you, you can use that support base to come out to others you might find more challenging. Chat, text/call with a friend for emotional support. Identify safe spaces you can go and be with a friend if you need some space.



TEST THE WATERS

If you're not sure how someone will react to your coming out, you can ask around the subject by asking how the person feels about a celebrity who has recently come out, a new story on LGBTQ+ topics, their feelings about LGBTQ+ rights/movements, another out family member or friend.



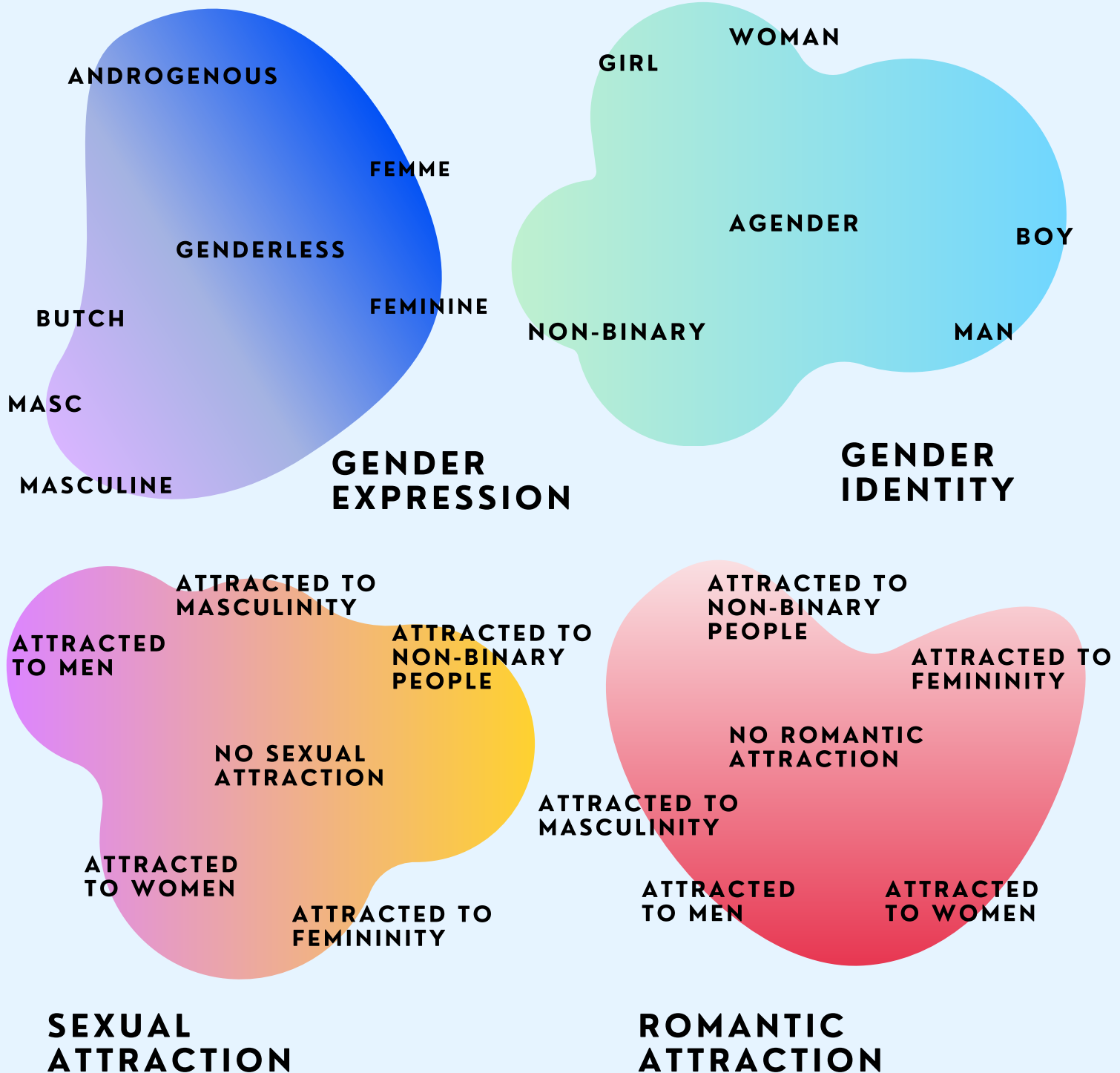
BE FLEXIBLE

Identities change, Coming out as one thing does not mean you are then contractually obliged to keep that identity. As we change we might find our pronouns, sexuality or gender identity shift too, and we might need to come out as something else later on- don't feel restricted to one label by coming out. It's a continual process of self-discovery.



Identity Map

This little map can help you visualise your identity today. These categories can change, of course! If you don't see yourself reflected here, add your categories.



Second Chances

Think about the amount of time it took you to work out how you felt about your gender identity or sexuality. There are possibly many conflicting feelings you have around about it even now. You might find that your feelings towards yourself change with time in terms of levels of confidence and comfort. It's hard to have a sexuality or gender identity that stands outside of societal expectations for us, so what we seek are strong and supportive allies who stand up for us and know we should be respected.

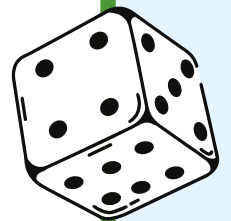
However, when it comes to being faced with bad reactions, the silver lining is that a poor first conversation doesn't mean it will remain that way forever. Remember that those that you do come out to haven't had that time to come to terms with all those conflicting feelings. If there is a bad reaction, know that it is not your fault, and you deserve kindness and respect. Take time to look after yourself and put distance between the person who had the bad reaction and yourself.

If you can, after you have processed your own emotional reaction, take some time to remember that they have not had all the time you have to come to terms with this, and remind yourself that actually, with more education on gender and sexuality, putting aside their idea of you and accepting you as you are, and given the same amount of time, they might too come to the same place of acceptance. Maybe they are being unkind. Maybe you were not kind to yourself in the past, either. There might be a future where you can forgive them, as you forgave yourself for not fully accepting yourself sooner.

Coming out is a long process and not just one conversation- you can keep having the conversation in different ways, you can give people second chances to say the right things, whether next week, month, or year. But you don't owe anyone this. You have a right to dictate your boundaries, and if these connections prove too challenging, you need to look after your own mental health and surround yourself with those who do show you kindness and respect.

Sometimes it doesn't go to plan. We don't get welcomed with open arms and love as we should be. We might be met with fear or confusion or rejection. Your safety and your wellbeing should be the most important thing here. If you think it's possible that the person you are coming out to will react badly, you might want to:

- Think about ways you can come out with distance between you for processing so you don't receive an immediate emotional response.
- Call, text or chat with a friend / loved one for support.
- Identify safe places you can go if you need to leave to get some space
- Plan your coming out in advance by talking it through with a trained councillor
- Find other LGBTQ+ people to connect with who know what you're going through



Pride and Shame

It's not popular to talk about feeling shame when it comes to identity, because we know we are "supposed" to feel pride. So we don't talk about it - but it is completely normal. Logically, we know that there isn't anything wrong with being LGBTQ+. But what we logically know, and what we emotionally feel are two very different human responses. We might logically know that, for example, a friend has a wider circle of friends than we do, and we are happy that they are fulfilled in this regard. However, this might not develop into a happy emotion, such as that of being supportive of our friend and their popularity, but one of jealousy, focusing inwards towards our own negatives - why don't we have a wide circle of friends? Rather than thinking of the positives for them. It's not a 'rational' response, but it's the one you feel. Just as we might logically know that our identity isn't shameful, maybe we still feel guilt for keeping it a secret, or shame about others reactions to us, or even, feel shame for feeling ashamed, when we see others be so out and proud and unapologetic. Why can't we be like that?

Coming out is something you shouldn't feel any external pressure to do. Some people don't come out until very late in life, some face factors that mean it is currently impossible to come out, which they are waiting to change first. Most of us find the thing that holds us back a lot is fear - fear of rejection, of the consequences, of loss, of gain. We don't know what our lives look like after that point. You can be out to just yourself and your identity does not become less valid: you are worthy of respect and love.

Shame around our identity happens. It's okay to feel exhausted. It is tiring to to keep having to hide parts of yourself, just as it is tiring to have to constantly assert your identity. Both have challenges.

Pride and Shame

The most important thing is you are not alone, and these feelings can help you figure out where you want to get to in terms of your own emotional journey. If you're really struggling it might be a good step to talk to others or seek some support from a councillor. The project can help you access low-cost counselling options, and we can also offer 1:1 appointments in a safe and non-judgemental space to help you through difficult times and see you on your way to good times, too. Details on page 15.

How do you want to feel about your sexuality/gender?

What do you think will be better for you if you come out?

Is there anything you would change about how you present if you were not worried about other people's opinions?

Who do you admire that is out? What was their journey?

What parts of yourself do you feel you have to hide from people?

Do you have a good support system? Is there a way you can seek to improve this if not?

Supporting others

One of the nicest things we can do as LGBTQ+ folks is to empower others through our own experiences. Once you have told your story, you might find someone else going through the same things, and you can use your story to enable them to find their voice - it's all about connection.



It might help you to write your story out. How does it end? What do you learn from the coming out experience? What would you have liked to have gone differently? Do you think you are different because of it? What would you want to tell someone going through the same thing as you?

What part of yourself do you feel you have to hide? What would you need to change in the world to be able to be yourself fully? Can you be a part of that change for someone else?



Supporting others

Check- do they have a good support system? Can you be a part of that support system?

Thank them for sharing something private and for trusting them - don't minimise the occasion by saying "i already knew" or 'that's not news' - it's a big act of trust they are showing you! Give it the respect it deserves.

Even if you don't have all the answers/know a lot about LGBTQ+ issues, just saying you will be supportive of them and reassuring them it's normal and okay will make a big difference.

Challenge gender stereotypes wherever they arise in your own and other people's language to help stop reinforcing them!

How can I support someone who comes out to me?

Make an active stance against Homophobic, Biphobic and transphobic bullying wherever you see it.

Do not pass the information on unless they allow you to share it.

Ask them what they need from you right now!

Listen to the language they use to describe their gender identity/sexuality/ ask about pronouns, respect and use the terminology they are comfortable with

In School

How supported do you feel at school?
Check whether:

- Your school runs an LGBTQ+ group for students
- Your school has LGBTQ+ visible inclusion
- Your school is part of the Norfolk LGBTQ+ Project's Educating with Pride Network
- Anti-bullying is enforced and LGBTQ+ students are included
- You would feel safe being out at school
- You feel your peers and friends would have your back

Reach out to staff members/ peers who have indicated they are supportive allies or LGBTQ+ themselves.

If you're feeling really brave you might want to speak up for others and yourself if you think LGBTQ+ inclusion is missing from your school and suggest it should be included! Sometimes it only takes one voice to make a change happen- like a ripple effect, and you can make an environment much more welcome for others who feel the same as you.

Sometimes we don't all get the opportunity to come out in our own time as we should, and others out us. If this happens in a school environment, you should suggest that the person who outs you undergoes some additional support in learning about LGBTQ+ issues and why this is not okay. There might not have been any bad intentions behind it, but quite often people fail to realise the importance of telling your own story. Personal information like this should only be yours to share, and others can disclose it only with your permission, or until you are comfortable for everyone to know.

It might even be a topic that is worth the whole school discussing or having an assembly/ lessons in as gender and sexuality spectrums are not really taught in schools and often people misinterpret what having an LGBTQ+ identity is, mixing up sex, gender, sexual orientation and gender presentation. It is tiring to have to educate others on your own identity so don't feel you have to do so, you can say as much or as little as you want to - but there will always be opportunities to turn difficult experiences into a way to help others, and grow in the process.

Community

Being an LGBTQ+ young person means that it is hard to find yourself on your own terms, because often other people will expect you to be certain things based on their assumptions about what LGBTQ+ people should and shouldn't be. We want everyone to be themselves, but we also want them to be themselves in the RIGHT ways, in the ways we recognise as valid. If this seems unfair - it is.

That's why this booklet keeps emphasising that there is no right way to come out. There is also no right way to be LGBTQ+. There are many identities within an identity, and choosing a label does not mean you have to embody everything other people associate with that label.

Your journey isn't anyone else's. We can look up to others and relate to their experiences, but they still won't be exactly the same. Sometimes in order to find our own identity we create labels for others, too. But to make your own identity real does not mean that you have to invalidate other people's identity. For example, some LGBTQ+ people will pride themselves on say, not being 'camp' or passing well, not 'looking trans' not being one of 'those gays'. In validating our own LGBTQ+ identity, we tear down other peoples, and we must remember that when we say these things, we continue to suggest that being camp, or feminine, or looking trans, are bad things to be, which hurts all of us.

The LGBTQ+ community is like any community - it fights a lot amongst itself. Look for those that make you feel seen, heard and respected, and question the connections you have that do not make you feel those things - investigate why that is. Your chosen group of people are your own community, which also looks different to everyone. It might be other LGBTQ+ people, friends or family. Together we can focus on what unites us and support each other.



Family



Family can be especially scary to come out to as they are often the people we spend most time with and care about the most. They might also have preconceived ideas about what they want for you when you are older, or how they imagine your life to be, that they hold onto when having this discussion. Think about how to have the discussion in a safe and approachable way, where you feel most comfortable, and also where you feel able to leave and get some space should you need to.



Even though coming out is about you, it's nice to consider others when you can and you know your family best. Think about the time & spaces you think might be best for them to have this conversation with you too, as you want it to go as well as possible!

If you need support in getting ready to come out, or think your parents or guardians might benefit from speaking to other parents of LGBTQ+ children, then you can contact us for support. We might be able to help in speaking with parents and keeping your lines of communication open on this topic.



Our Services



BLAH LGBT+ Youth project provides support for young LGBT+ people and those questioning their sexuality and gender identity aged 25yrs and under. We have 4 BLAH LGBT+ Youth groups – Norwich, King’s Lynn, Breckland (situated in Thetford) and Great Yarmouth.

Please email us at blah@norfolklgbtproject.org.uk or call 01603 219299 for more information.

“BLAH has given me the confidence to be who I am without being ashamed” – A. 17.



We currently run low-cost professional counselling (£5 per session) for individuals who need support around issues relating to sexuality and/or gender identity. We will team you up with a qualified counsellor who specialises in LGBT+ support. If you are 18 years old, you will need parental consent to undertake these sessions.

For more information please email counselling@norfolklgbtproject.org.uk



We have lots more services that may be of use to you such as our variety of support and social groups, schools work and peer mentoring. We also offer 1:1's for those who prefer just talking one to one about issues they might be facing - for these and more, check out our website norfolklgbtproject.org.uk and email info@norfolklgbtproject.org.uk for more information on how we can support you.

Back Cover