

Coming Out in the Family

On November 24, 2001, the Tacoma chapter of PFLAG held a group discussion on *Coming Out in the Family*. The group consisted of a mix of GLBTQ individuals, their parents, friends and relatives. Three topics were presented to the group for open discussion. The following is a synopsis of that discussion.

Topic 1: Why should you come out?

- It takes too much energy to constantly "lie" to your family and friends and to remember the stories and responses you have made up to hide your sexuality.
- You get more support when you're "out".
- It can be very lonely when you're "in".
- Coming out is a way to see if the love from your family or friends is real.
- There is a need to share your life with those you love.
- The actual consequences of coming out are usually better than you imagined them.
- It is important to be "out" so people know we are here (We're here, we're queer, so get used to it!).
- Coming out often brings parents much closer to their children.
- Showing the courage to come out will make you proud of yourself.
- It is better for parents, relatives and friends to know the truth.
- By being in the closet, you effectively give people permission to be homophobic.
- Coming out is a great way to educate people. Most people are not well informed about homosexuality because they don't know any gay people personally. Come out to as many people as you can.
- Coming out helps to make you the best person you can be.

Topic 2: What are some of the relationships/considerations you have to deal with when coming out?

- Employers and co-workers. When you are "in" you can't talk about your partner, your relationship and the other things you normally discuss with people at work.
- Relationships with friends can change greatly (for better or for worse).
- Opposite-sex relationships. If you're gay and not out, it can complicate relationships with members of the opposite sex. They may expect something you can't give.
- Aunts, uncles, and extended family can have the same types of reactions your non-family friends do.
- Institutional relationships, such as church, school or military.
- Spousal relationships.

Topic 3: How should you come out?

- Most important, be prepared. Have a book or brochure you can hand out to help inform people on homosexuality. If they are having a hard time dealing with what you tell them, PFLAG can be a great resource for them. Have a phone number for a local PFLAG chapter handy. Be open to questions.
- Be confident. You may have to act as a counselor to your friend or family member for a while.
- Wait until you are ready.
- Keep in mind that you have been dealing with this issue for a much longer time than the person you are coming out to. It may take them some time to adjust.
- Don't assume that your parents or friends already know your sexuality.
- Be prepared for rejection. Some people won't react well, but will adjust to it over time. The time for them to accept the situation could be a few days or many months.

- Have a safe place to go in case things go badly.
- Tell the "easy" people first.
- In difficult cases, ease parents or friends into the situation by letting them get to know your partner or gay friends. If they first know them as people, they will be more accepting when you finally come out.
- When coming out to casual friends, don't make a big production out of it. If you don't make a big issue out of it, they probably won't either.
- Be prepared to lose a friend or relationship.
- Follow your heart. If your heart says "come out", then do it.
- In some cases, it's best to just come out with your guns blazing. Don't beat around the bush. There is no need to apologize for your sexuality. This doesn't work with all people. You'll need to rely on your intuition and knowledge of your family member or friend to know if this approach, or a more subtle approach is best.