“Coming out” is a psychological process or journey of exploring your sexual orientation and sharing that orientation with others. The decision to come out is always personal. It can be one of the most rewarding experiences of your life. There may also be negative ramifications associated with coming out and you may want to prepare yourself for these possibilities. Fear of rejection prevents many from being open about their sexual orientation. This may change as you experience support and advocacy from both the LGBTQ community and the heterosexual community.

**COMING OUT TO YOURSELF**

Recognizing and accepting your own sexual orientation are the first two steps necessary for coming out.

- Sexual orientation is defined on a continuum that ranges from exclusive same-sex attraction to exclusive opposite-sex attraction. In recognizing your own sexual orientation, it is helpful to understand where you fit along this continuum.
- Finding a well-adjusted and confident role model in the LGBTQ community can be helpful in developing your own self-acceptance.
- Be aware of the homophobia and societal biases that have been imposed upon you throughout your life. Internalizing these ideas is nearly impossible to avoid, though holding on to them is self-destructive.
- Note the positive outcomes that can be attained through coming out:
  - Increased self-esteem
  - Greater honesty in your life
  - Stronger personal integrity
  - Genuine self-expression
  - Freedom to stop hiding or denying an important part of your life
- Learn about others’ experiences in coming out. Determine those that are relevant to your circumstances and how they might help guide you through your process.

**COMING OUT TO THE LGBTQ COMMUNITY**

After spending time learning about your feelings and growing to accept them, you may be ready to come out to others. For a more positive experience, consider coming out first to those with whom you feel safe. Choose people you believe will be supportive.

Because people from the LGBTQ community may have already experienced some of what you are going through, they may prove to be a strong support system. Sharing similar feelings and experiences might help prevent you from feeling isolated. Be mindful that “similar” does not mean “same.” The process of coming out is different for everyone and you must seek your own path in your own time. You are not obligated to conform to any real or perceived expectations of the LGBTQ community. You will gain confidence by remaining true to yourself. This is your process of self-discovery and sharing, nobody else’s. You need to embrace it in ways that feel safe and appropriate for you.

**COMING OUT TO HETEROSEXUALS**

Coming out to heterosexuals might be more challenging than coming out to other LGBTQ individuals. It is important to be prepared for the full range of reactions you may receive. Understand that some may be shocked, confused, or disappointed by your disclosure. They may need time to process this new information. If you experience rejection, don’t give up hope. Many people will come around in time. Know that others will also be accepting, supportive, and excited for you.

The process of coming out takes time and the decision to come out should not be made in the spur of the moment. Coming out is a process that works best as an action, not a reaction. In coming out to others, consider the following:

- Choose the time and place carefully, considering yourself and your listener. What is ideal for you may not be ideal for someone else.
- Practice what you want to say and present yourself honestly
- Have empathy for your listener’s experience, as you hope they will have empathy for yours.
- Remember that it took you time to process and understand your sexuality. Be prepared for some to react negatively at first. Don’t get discouraged. Be patient and give them time to come to terms with it.
- Have resources available for yourself and your loved ones to assist in understanding.
- Engage in self-care throughout the coming out process. Though it can be freeing and exciting, it can also be stressful and scary. Seek support.

The NDC Counseling Center is a safe place for LGBTQ students to seek support and help. We respect your journey and are committed to providing you with confidential, sensitive, and supportive services. WE’RE HERE TO HELP!