



Employee NEWSLETTER

Employee Assistance Program
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Celebrate National Coming Out Day!

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October 11th, 2020 marks the 32nd anniversary of National Coming Out Day. In 1988, gay rights activist Jean O’Leary and psychologist Dr. Robert Eichberg founded this day of observance and recognition for the LGBTQ (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer) community in memoriam of what is now known as “The Great March” on Washington for Lesbian and Gay Rights. Since then, National Coming Out Day is celebrated with workshops, speaks-outs, rallies, and other events to promote the visibility of LGBTQ people and pride.

Living in a society where it is assumed that people are heterosexual and cisgender (people who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth) forces people to announce their gender or sexual identity to others if it is outside the “norm”. Coming out is a highly personal decision and one that unfortunately continues to carry much stigma and shame. It can be a very emotional time in one’s life that involves self-acceptance of one’s identity and may put that person at risk of discrimination, harassment, and/or violence. This act of incredible bravery can be a very positive experience for one whose family, friends, or co-workers respond with love and compassion. If someone comes out to you, here are a few suggestions that can help to create a sense of trust and safety:

- 1. Validate the person.** Emphasize your connection with the person and remind them that your relationship will not change, especially if you are talking to your child or another family member. Higher rates of mental health issues, substance use, problems at school, and even self-harm and suicide are found in LGBTQ youth who feel rejected by their family or community.
- 2. Respect boundaries.** Working up the courage to come out to yourself and then finally someone else requires a significant amount of self-acceptance and bravery. Respect their boundaries by giving them space to talk if they feel comfortable doing so, but not asking prying questions. They may be open to you but not ready to disclose this information to others.
- 3. Offer support.** Start off by asking the person directly if there is anything you can do to support them. Ways to provide support may include simply listening in a respectful and non-judgmental way, speaking up if you hear others making anti-LGBTQ statements, using inclusive language, or joining LGBTQ advocacy organizations that promote the rights of gender and sexual minorities. Some people may ask for help coming out to others or navigating how to approach specific scenarios such as work or school.

Often, people assume “coming out” is a one-time event, when the reality is it will likely have to be repeated a number of times, likely throughout the rest of their lives. Each time involves anticipation over how the listener will react and worry about rejection. The person coming out may feel skeptical and disbelieving of responses,

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even if they are positive and accepting. This doubt and confusion can take a toll on someone as the realities of building a new identity and becoming part of a minority start to set in.

For those that have recently come out or are thinking about coming out, talking to someone can help. Find someone that has been through a similar experience and can help you to understand a process that can otherwise feel lonely and difficult. If you would like to seek support and community around coming out, please check out the following organizations and links:

Human Rights Campaign

<https://www.hrc.org/resources/coming-out>

Find your local PFLAG chapter

pflag.org/ind-a-chapter

The Trevor Project

www.thetrevorproject.org

