

COMING OUT AS TRANSGENDER

The National Center for Transgender Equality is a national social justice organization devoted to ending discrimination and violence against transgender people through education and advocacy on national issues of importance to transgender people. By empowering transgender people and our allies to educate and influence policymakers and others, NCTE facilitates a strong and clear voice for transgender equality in our nation's capital and around the country. NCTE is a 501(c)3 organization. For more information, please visit www.NCTEquality.org.

From the earliest age, children are taught that there are girls and there are boys. But our history books are rich with individuals who have blurred — or even crossed — those lines.

While gender is presented to us as a mutually exclusive pair — male and female — the truth is that gender is a rich, broad spectrum that comes in as many forms as there are people.

For many people, expressing gender is an unconscious action. It's as simple as styling your hair or tying a tie. It causes no angst or uncertainty.

But for those whose gender identity, or innate sense of gender, doesn't match with the one they were assigned at birth, it can be a complex and difficult undertaking.

Many of these individuals come to identify as *transgender*, an umbrella term that describes a wide range of people who experience or express their gender in different, sometimes non-traditional, ways.

Transgender people must make deeply personal decisions to be open and honest about who we are with ourselves and others — even when it isn't easy.

We express that openness by being our full and complete selves among our friends, our family, our co-workers and, sometimes, even strangers.

Each of us meets this challenge in our own way and in our own time. Throughout the process of coming out and living ever more authentic lives, you should always be in the driver's seat about how, where, when and with whom you choose to be open.

This guide was designed to help you and your loved ones through that process in realistic and practical terms. It acknowledges that the experience of coming out covers the full spectrum of human emotion — from paralyzing fear to unbounded euphoria.

The Human Rights Campaign and its Coming Out Project and the National Center for Transgender Equality hope this guide helps you meet the challenges and opportunities that living authentically can offer to each of us.

A Special Note: No resource can be fully applicable to every member of the gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender community. Beyond this general guide to coming out, the Human Rights Campaign recently published *Transgender Americans: A Handbook for Understanding*, with the supporting partnership of the National Center for

Transgender Equality and the Transgender Law & Policy Institute. This guide offers a more comprehensive look at the myriad issues faced by transgender Americans. Download the guide by visiting www.hrc.org/transgender.

The National Center for Transgender Equality also offers a range of resources at www.nctequality.org that can help transgender people, friends, family and co-workers wherever they are on the path to understanding.

The Human Rights Campaign's other resources include materials specifically designed for transitioning in the workplace, coming out in places of worship and coming out in African-American, Latino/a and other communities. Visit www.hrc.org for additional information.

Being Open With Yourself

From birth, most of us are raised to think of ourselves as fitting into a certain mold. Our culture and families teach us that we are "supposed" to look, act and carry ourselves in certain ways.

Few of us were told that we might have a gender identity that differs from the body into which we were born or that we might feel compelled to express our gender in ways that aren't traditionally associated with the gender we were assigned at birth.

That's why so many of us are scared, worried or confused when facing these truths in ourselves. We can spend a lifetime attempting to hide it, hoping against hope that it's not true or that it might someday simply go away.

There is no one moment when it's "right" to be open with oneself. Some transgender people have long battled with living lives they think they're supposed to live instead of the lives they know they were meant to live. And some come to question their gender identities and expressions suddenly.

Transgender people come out during all stages and walks of life — when they're teens, when they're seniors; when they're married, when they're single; when they have children, when they don't.

Some transgender people come out simply by having the courage to be different. This can range from women who express themselves in traditionally masculine ways to men who do things that are generally considered feminine. For many of these people, coming out is never a question. They are out simply by being themselves.

Transgender people who identify as crossdressers and some transsexuals may feel little need to come out to others. They may crossdress in private and consider it a harmless but compelling aspect of their personalities.

Some transgender people who are considering coming out identify as transsexual. They have a sense of gender that does not match their sex as assigned at birth. Whether by asking friends, family and co-workers to use another name and pronoun, or by undergoing a medical transition, coming out to others is critical.

Given the diversity among transgender people, there's no single rule to be applied as to whether a person will or even should come out to others.

But the one thing we all have in common is that we take our first step by being open with ourselves.

Throughout the coming out process, it's normal to feel:

- Scared
- Confused
- Guilty
- Empowered
- Exhilarated
- Relieved
- Proud
- Uncertain
- Brave
- Affirmed

FINDING A COMMUNITY

For many of us who have just come out to ourselves as transgender, it's important to find others who share similar experiences and emotions. Finding a community of peers can help us feel less alone on our new paths and can answer questions we might have about next steps.

If you live near a major city, you may find support or social groups nearby. For those living in less urban areas, finding an official group may be more difficult. But transgender people live in every corner of the world, and you are not alone. One place to start is the Internet. A wide range of transgender communities exists online. Whether by subscribing to an e-mail group or joining an online community, you can find numerous resources on the Web.

Deciding to Tell Others

Some transgender people who are coming out to others have reached a breaking point in their lives where it's too difficult to hide who they are any longer.

Whether it's the cross-dresser burdened with a secret he's hidden from his spouse or it's a young lesbian who feels she doesn't fit into a traditional gender role, transgender people feel compelled to share who they are so as to have stronger and more authentic relationships with those closest to them.

After coming out, many people feel as if a great weight has been lifted from their shoulders. In the process of coming out, they may also break down stereotypes and other barriers as they live more open lives.

While there are benefits, there can also be serious risks and consequences involved in coming out. The decision is yours and yours alone. It's important to weigh both risks and benefits before making a choice to tell others.

“There are just as many gender identities as there are individuals.

Being transgender is just one part of who I am.”

Some Benefits of Coming Out:

Living an open and whole life
Developing closer, more genuine relationships
Building self-esteem from being known and loved for who we really are
Reducing the stress of hiding our identity
Having authentic and open friendships

with other transgender people
Helping to dispel myths and fears about transgender people
Becoming a role model for others
Making it easier for younger transgender people who will follow in our footsteps

Some Risks/Consequences of Coming Out:

Not everyone will be understanding or accepting
Family, friends and co-workers may be shocked, confused or even hostile
Some relationships may permanently change
You may experience harassment, discrimination or violence
You may be thrown out of your home
You may lose your job
Some young people may lose financial support from their parents
Remember, there's no right or wrong way to come out or live openly. It does not mean you have to be out at all times or in all places – you decide how, where and when based on what's right for you.

A Note On Transitioning

It's important to remember that transgender is a broad term describing many different people who express gender in many different ways, each as authentically as the next.

For many transgender people, transitioning — the period of time when a person changes from living in one gender to living in another — is the time at which coming out becomes critical to our lives.

Transitioning does not always involve medical treatment. By dressing in preferred-gender clothing, changing their bodies through exercise, adjusting mannerisms and speech patterns or requesting that friends and family call them by their preferred names, transgender people often use non-medical options to live their gender identities.

Others who are transitioning pursue hormones and sometimes surgery to bring their bodies more in line with their gender identities.

In many parts of the world, the accepted treatment protocol for those who undertake a medical transition is known as “Standards of Care.” These standards are developed by the World Professional Association for Transgender Health (formerly known as the Harry Benjamin International Gender Dysphoria Association). WPATH, online at www.wpath.org, is a professional organization devoted to the understanding and treatment of gender identity disorders.

Official Standards of Care Involve: Psychological supervision for at least a year before sex-reassignment surgery
Hormone replacement therapy for at least a year before surgery
Successfully living in the new gender role for at least a year before surgery
Changing name and identity documents to align with new gender role
Obtaining two supporting letters from psychological providers
Another increasingly common protocol is known as “Informed Consent.” Through this protocol, transgender people are made aware of the effects of medical treatment and then asked to consent, much like other medical procedures. And some doctors supervise medical transitions through a combination of both protocols.

Regardless of the how a person lives his or her gender identity, transitioning can be a very public “outing.” It involves disclosing to family, friends, employers and, clearly,

healthcare providers. By its very nature, transitioning is not something that can be hidden for most transgender people.

When it comes to transitioning, a broad range of medical personnel — from psychologists to surgeons to voice therapists — may be consulted. If possible, it's very helpful to find healthcare professionals in your geographic area who are experienced in treating transgender patients. If no providers in your area do, an open-minded provider who is willing to learn about the Standards of Care and specific health needs of transgender people should be sufficient.

Questions for Healthcare Providers: Have you had transgender patients in the past? Do you understand hormone regimens appropriate for transgender patients? What treatment protocol do you follow for transitions? Remember: Do your research first. Even doctors who have had transgender patients in the past may not be experts on transitioning. Many websites and advocacy groups can offer guidance on medical transitioning. It's key to be your own health advocate.

While this guide primarily covers transgender people who are at their first stages of coming out, some of us may confront the issue of coming out again, after transitioning, among new friends,

family and co-workers. Some transgender people choose to lead "stealth" lives. While they may disclose their transgender status to healthcare professionals, they do not discuss their transition or gender assigned at birth with others, unless necessary.

Many others find that, like for many gay, lesbian and bisexual people, living authentically means telling those with whom they are close about their transitions.

Still others are confronted with the challenge of coming out more publicly by being personal advocates, whether they do that through the pages of a newspaper article or by discussing their personal journeys in front of classes studying transgender issues at local colleges or universities.

The pages that follow can help you in making your decision, whether this is your first time coming out or you're well into your coming out journey.

Making a Coming Out Plan

When you're ready to tell that first person — or even those first few people — give yourself time to prepare. Think through the options and make a deliberate plan of whom, when and how to approach. Ask yourself the following questions:

Do you know what it is you want to say?

Particularly at the beginning of the coming out process, many people are still answering tough questions for themselves and are not ready to identify as transgender. Or they may know they are transgender without knowing exactly what that means to them. That's OK. Maybe you just want to tell someone that you're starting to ask yourself these questions. Even if you don't yet have all the answers, your feelings are what matter. To get a better idea of what it is you want to communicate, try writing it down to help organize your thoughts.

Who should you tell first?

This can be a critical decision. You may want to select people who you suspect will be most supportive, as their support can assist you in coming out to others. If you're coming out at work, who is the point person? Your Human Resources representative? A manager or coworker? Do your homework before deciding. Also, know that this kind of news can travel quickly. If you'd prefer that the people you tell keep your news confidential, be sure to tell them so. Still, don't be surprised if they share the news with others before you have a chance to do it yourself.

What kinds of signals are you getting?

Sometimes you can get a sense of how accepting people will be by the things they say. Maybe a transgender-themed movie, like *TransAmerica*, or a transgender character on a TV show can get a discussion started. Or maybe someone in your life has told you that they joined a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights organization. But don't read into these conversations too closely. The most gayfriendly person in the office may react negatively, and the person who makes an anti-transgender joke may end up being your biggest supporter.

Are you well-informed and willing to answer questions?

People's reactions to the news that you're transgender may depend largely on how much information they have about transgender issues and how much they feel they can ask. While more and more people are familiar with gay, lesbian and bisexual people and issues of sexual orientation, issues surrounding gender identity and expression are different. They aren't yet as widely understood.

If you're well-informed and open to answering questions, you can go a long way toward helping others to understand. Some of helpful facts and frequently asked questions can be found later in this guide. More information is available at www.hrc.org and www.nctequality.org.

Is this a good time? Timing is key. Be aware of the mood, priorities, stresses and problems of those to whom you would like to come out. If they're dealing with their own major life concerns, they may not be able to respond constructively.

Can you be patient? Just as it took you time to come to terms with being transgender, some people will need time to think things over after you come out to them. The reason you've chosen to be open with these people is that you care about them. If they react strongly, it's probably because they care about you, too. Be prepared to give them space to adjust. Rather than expecting immediate understanding, try to establish an ongoing, caring dialogue.

Is it safe to come out? If you have any doubt at all as to your safety, carefully weigh your risks and options.

Transgender people face the real threat of harassment and violence, and some transgender people choose to come out in a safe space with friends by their sides to ensure their safety. Also, while more and more localities are passing laws that ban discrimination against transgender people, most transgender Americans are not legally protected from workplace discrimination.

As a result, coming out to someone at work could cost you your job, and sometimes your livelihood.

Visit www.hrc.org/workplace/transgender for a comprehensive guide to coming out in the workplace.

Having the Conversation

It's normal to want or hope for positive reactions from the people you tell, but that may not happen immediately. It helps to put yourself in their shoes.

The person you come out to may feel: ⁿ Surprised ⁿ Honored ⁿ Uncomfortable ⁿ Scared ⁿ Unsure how to react ⁿ Supportive ⁿ Skeptical ⁿ Relieved ⁿ Curious ⁿ Angry ⁿ Uncertain what to do next You may want to verbalize the range of feelings they might be having and reassure them that it's OK to ask questions. People will generally take their cues from you in how to approach things, so if you're open and honest, you'll probably get openness and honesty in return.

Appropriate and gentle humor can also go a long way toward easing anxiety for both you and the person with whom you're speaking. Always remember to give them time. It has taken you time to get to this point.

Now they need time to understand things, too.

"It's up to you to decide when and where you come out. Coming out as transgender is just one step along the path toward living openly."

Telling Parents Regardless of your age, you may be afraid your parents will reject you if you come out. The good news is that most parents are able to come to an understanding. Some may never quite get it, but others may surprise you by becoming advocates themselves. However, if you are under 18 or financially dependent on your parents, consider this decision very carefully.

Some reactions you may want to prepare for:

Parents may react in ways that hurt. They may cry, get angry or feel embarrassed. Some parents will need to grieve over the dreams they've had for you before they see the new, more genuine life you are building for yourself.

Some parents may say things like, "Well, you'll always be a daughter to me. Never a son." Or they may be unkind about the way you express your gender. It may take time for them to get used to seeing you in this new light.

They may ask where they "went wrong" or if they did something to "cause this." Assure them they did nothing wrong.

Some may call being transgender a sin or attempt to send you to a counselor or therapist in hopes they can "change" you. Some parents may already know or have an inkling that you are transgender. For these parents, hearing your news may come as a sense of relief.

Good or bad, their initial feelings may not reflect their feelings over the long term. Keep in mind, this is big news and there's no timetable for how long it takes parents to adjust.

Telling Children

There's no one right or wrong way to have this conversation. Coming out to children can seem a daunting task. Depending on their ages, you may be worried about them rejecting you or about their safety at school if they tell friends.

If you have a partner or spouse or ex-partner or spouse who is involved with your children's lives, you may want to have the conversation together, if possible. Or you might find that bringing a grandparent into the conversation is a good idea.

Your children may have questions that they feel better asking another parent or grandparent, for fear that they'll hurt your feelings. Older children, especially, may need more time to think about the news you've just told them before they're ready to talk.

It may be helpful to arrange a family counseling session to sort through feelings. And giving your children the ability to talk to other children of transgender parents can be enormously helpful.

For Family and Friends

If your friend or family member has come out to you as transgender, you may be wondering how to respond. Everyone does so differently. Many are confused and have questions. Some are relieved they know what's been on their loved one's mind. And others are hurt they weren't told sooner.

You may feel a mixture of all three emotions and more.

Regardless of how you're feeling, it's helpful if you can reassure your family member or friend that your feelings for them have not suddenly disappeared. Let them know you will try your best to support them through this process. It's OK to tell them it's going to take some time to adjust.

Be honest with them if you have questions you'd like to ask as they, too, had questions they had to answer along the way to coming out.

If you have questions you're uncomfortable asking them, resources exist elsewhere. Support groups — both online and in many cities and towns across the country — can help you get the answers you're looking for. There are also a range of books and websites that offer more information. You can find resources and answers to some common questions at the end of this guide.

In the end, knowing that you still care is what matters most to your friend or family member.

A Note for Parents of Transgender Children While some transgender people only come to understand their identity as adults, there are many who deal with these questions at very young ages.

If you're reading this guide, it means you're already well on the way toward providing a supportive environment for your child.

It's important to let your children explore their gender without trying to change or pressure them toward one gender expression. There are some circumstances where

this may prove difficult — if your child refuses to wear the school uniform for their sex assigned at birth, for example.

While you can't allow your children to always get their way, these may be more than small refusals.

Talk to your child to gauge how important these issues are to them. It may also help to talk to school authorities and work out a solution.

Many parents also pursue counseling with their children. But it's important to let your child know that there's nothing wrong with them if you decide counseling is necessary. Seeking out a supportive therapist who has experience with gender differences is also wise.

Above all, reassure your children that differences are celebrated and you love them no matter what.

Acceptance of diversity is an important value for all children.

You are on a coming out journey that is ongoing. It's one that unfolds at your own pace and gets exponentially easier with time.

The Coming Out Continuum

The world is not the same today as it was 20, 10 or even five years ago for transgender people.

Today, there are more and more people who discover they identify as neither male nor female and express their gender in less traditional ways.

For those who transitioned years ago, it was often a danger to do anything but move to another community and begin new lives. The pressure to stay in the closet about their transition could become almost as oppressive as the pressures they once felt to hide their true genders. But with a newfound sense of community, there are more transgender people choosing to come out about their unique histories.

Regardless of where you fit on the spectrum of transgender identities, you are on a coming out journey that is ongoing. It's one that unfolds at your own pace and gets exponentially easier with time.

It doesn't have to be a planned conversation.

It can be as passive as acknowledging your involvement in a gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights organization.

Living openly doesn't mean that the sole, or even primary, aspect of who you are is your gender identity or expression. It just means that this part of your life is as natural a part of your life as your eye color, your height or your personality.

But it's not just about you. Living openly teaches others that there's more to gender than they might have ever known. It paves the way for future generations of transgender youth. And it lets others know, especially those who are biased or judgmental, that their attitudes are theirs alone.

On a daily basis, you will face decisions about where, when and how to come out — or where, when and why not to. Always remember, this is your journey.

You get to decide how to take it.

Ten Things Every American Ought To Know

Seventy-eight percent of American voters believe it should be illegal to fire someone just because they are transgender. (September 2005 Human Rights Campaign/Hart Research poll)

Nearly half of the Fortune 100 — America's most profitable businesses — offer **non-discrimination policies that cover gender identity**. More and more companies add these protections every year.

(Human Rights Campaign, 2007) Eighty-four percent of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender students **report being verbally harassed** — name-calling, threats, etc. — at school. (Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network, 2003) **Hate crimes** against GLBT Americans are on the rise, even as other violent crimes continue to decline and current federal laws do not protect GLBT Americans from hate violence. (FBI Hate Crimes Statistics, 2004) Military regulations deny **transsexual Americans from serving openly**. At the same time, thousands of veterans have come out as transgender.

In the majority of states, it is **still legal to fire someone** from his or her job simply for being transgender.

While challenges exist, there are many transgender and **transgender-friendly faith leaders** and communities throughout the United States and beyond.

Throughout history and across cultures, people have expressed themselves in ways that we might consider transgender. Some Native American cultures identify "**two-spirited**" people as a revered class.

According to some estimates, **0.25 to 1 percent of the U.S. population is transsexual**. But the actual percentage of transsexual people, and especially those who identify under the broader transgender identity, is thought to be much higher.

Transgender non-discrimination protections in colleges and universities are on the rise, with more and more focus on full coverage among institutions of higher learning for students, faculty and staff, including all eight Ivy League institutions. Many colleges and **universities now offer gender-neutral housing options** for students living on campus.

Glossary of Terms

Many Americans don't talk about gender identity and expression because they feel it's taboo or are afraid of saying the wrong thing. This glossary was written to give people the words and meanings to help make conversations easier.

cross-dressers — Transgender people who wear clothing and/or makeup and accessories that are considered by society to correspond to the "opposite sex."

female-to-male transsexual (FTM) — Someone who was born female and transitions to a male gender identity.

gender expression — How a person behaves, appears or presents oneself with regard to societal expectations of gender.

gender identity — The gender that a person claims for oneself — which may or may not align with his or her gender assigned at birth.

genderqueer — A term people use to describe their own nonstandard gender identity or expression.

GLBT or LGBT — Acronyms for “gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender” or “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” **male-to-female transsexual (MTF)** — Someone who was born male and transitions to a female gender identity.

sexual orientation — A person’s enduring emotional, romantic, sexual and relational attraction to someone else, which is different from an innate sense of gender.

transgender — An umbrella term that applies to a broad range of people who experience and/or express their gender differently from what most people expect.

transition — A process through which some transgender people go when they decide to live as the gender with which they identify, not the one assigned at birth. This may or may not include hormone therapy, sex-reassignment surgery and other medical components.

transsexual — A person who — with or without medical treatment — identifies and lives his or her life as a member of the gender opposite the one he or she was assigned at birth.

transvestite — An outdated term — often considered pejorative — used to refer to people who cross-dress.

The Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation also offers a more detailed glossary, tailored for the media but also helpful for individuals looking to learn more, at: www.glaad.org/media/guide/transfocus.php.

A Note on Pronouns Transgender people should be identified with the pronoun that corresponds with the gender with which they identify. If you are unsure of someone’s gender, it’s appropriate to respectfully ask his or her name and what pronoun he or she prefers you use. In general, it’s considered insensitive to refer to someone by the wrong pronouns once you have established which set of pronouns they prefer.

Some Myths and Facts

Note: This is by no means a comprehensive guide on transgender issues. Instead, it is geared toward people who are just learning about transgender issues.

Here are some common myths and facts about transgender people:

Myth: Transgender people are confused.

Fact: Transgender people are no more and no less confused than most people. Gender is a much more complicated issue than most people are told, and sorting through gender differences can be challenging. But by the time someone is ready to come out as transgender, they have thought long and hard and are secure in their feelings.

Myth: It’s a “choice.”

Fact: Being transgender is no more a choice than having brown eyes, being left-handed, short or tall. The choice is deciding whether or not to live your life honestly with yourself and others.

Myth: Transgender people are really gay.

Fact: Gender identity and sexual orientation are two different subjects. Some transgender people are lesbian, gay or bisexual in their sexual orientation, and some are straight.

Myth: Transgender people are sinners.

Fact: Many transgender people are people of faith. While some find hostility in their churches, synagogues or mosques, still others are embraced by their spiritual peers. The number of transgenderfriendly places of worship is growing.

Myth: Transgender people can’t have families.

Fact: Whether they come out before a relationship or while in one, countless transgender people find love and happiness in their lives. In fact, most transgender people will tell you that after coming out, they feel a new sense of happiness that makes them a better partner and parent.

Myth: Transgender people can be cured.

Fact: There’s no “cure” for transgender people, although some do try to repress it. The most reputable medical and psychotherapeutic groups say you should not try to keep from being true to your gender identity. Instead, they say to focus on ways to come to an understanding and share your life openly with those you love.

Myth: All transgender people have surgery.

Fact: Many transgender people have no desire to pursue surgeries or medical intervention. At the same time, many transgender people cannot afford or have no access to surgeries. Considering these truths, it’s important that civil rights are afforded to all transgender people equally, regardless of their medical histories.

Myth: There are more male-to-female transgender people than female-to-male transgender people.

Fact: There is no way to know how many transgender people there are in the world, nor how many people identify as male-to-female or female-to-male. But even the best estimates show little difference in the numbers of MTF or FTM transgender people.

RESOURCES FOR MORE INFORMATION

Coming Out in the Workplace www.hrc.org/workplace/transgender

Health www.glma.org/index.cfm?fuseaction=Page.viewPage&pageId=664&parentID=533&nodeID=1

Identity Documents www.nctequality.org/issues/federal_documents.asp

Laws and Legislation www.nctequality.org, www.hrc.org and www.transgenderlawcenter.org

Religious Issues www.madeinimage.org and www.hrc.org/religion

For additional resources, visit www.hrc.org/library and <http://www.hrc.org/organizations> for the organization/agency database

A Message from Joe Solmonese

President, Human Rights Campaign

Thank you for taking the time to read Coming Out as Transgender.

While transgender people come out in different ways and confront some issues that are different from those faced by gay, lesbian and bisexual people, the task can be just as daunting, and the stress we all feel is just as real.

The simple truth is, the more we come out, the more free we feel. Living your life authentically can be an enormously enriching experience — and not merely for the person coming out. Our friends, our family and our co-workers come to know us for the people we truly are as we break down the walls of silence that separate us.

It's not always easy and there are difficult moments on every coming out journey. But it's a journey we must all take to live more complete lives.

And for those of us past the point of our first coming out experiences, by coming out about our lives to new friends and family, we're taking important steps not only for more meaningful relationships but to change hearts and minds.

As more and more people come to know transgender Americans, the myths and fears surrounding gender differences will be replaced with understanding. And it's this changing of hearts and minds that makes the biggest difference to our quest for equality.

Wherever you are on the coming out journey, the Human Rights Campaign congratulates you.

Sincerely, Joe Solmonese

...and from Mara Keisling

Executive Director, National Center Transgender Equality

I came out. And my life is entirely different now.

I feel very lucky — though there was nothing like this guide when I came out.

This guide has been written to support folks who are making plans to come out, as well as to provide information to help people who have been “out” for decades but who still negotiate living openly and safely every day. Whatever stage you are at, and however you identify, we're glad to provide you with this tool.

All lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people share a common vulnerability to discrimination, disrespect and even violence at work and in our communities. When we come out and live openly, we make a stand against these issues we face.

Coming out can be many things, from stormy to astonishing, but ultimately it is liberating. We prosper when we are fully ourselves. And when we're open, people can re-evaluate their views. By living openly, we transform the social landscape.

While the chance to change hearts and minds is great, discrimination, disrespect and violence are still risks for many transgender people. So please use your best judgment when coming out and only do what feels safe to you.

Finally, if you'd like to bring your experience and energy to social justice work and making coming out even easier for the waves of transgender people after you, support or volunteer for organizations like the National Center for Transgender Equality and the Human Rights Campaign. You would be a great asset in the work for equality.

Sincerely, Mara Keisling