

## Survival in an unfriendly environment after coming out

Coming out presents one of the most difficult challenges for people who have recently realized their LGBTI+ identity. They have walked the difficult path of accepting themselves and their uniqueness and for the first time feel confident enough to share this with others. While there is never a guarantee of responses, it is important for everyone to be prepared for all possible reactions - both surprisingly positive and expectedly hostile.

As an example, consider one of my disclosures - the one to my mother. She kept repeating how she would never accept that there was anything wrong with me and how I needed to be seen by a doctor and a psychologist. She went as far as verbally threatening to expose me to the rest of my family, to which I responded by threatening to run away from home and never come back, even though I was still a student. Thankfully, it didn't come to that, but I'm still grateful to my best friend and her family who were willing to accommodate me until my graduation.

*How can one prepare for the worst?* Before coming out for the first time, I consulted with the people closest to me for advice on how to approach the situation. I sought information and advice online and when I felt ready, I decided to act. Because I didn't know how my mother would react, I tried to keep my friends updated with the process so they would be ready to react if things started to escalate because I was scared of what might follow

*"If I receive hostility and aggression towards me, then what?"* Aggression can be verbal, not just physical. Constant tension resolves to stress. To lower the stress, one needs a safe community. For much of my early disclosure, I was able to find security and safety in a handful of close friends. Over time, I found more and more queer people. In smaller cities it's difficult to find your place, but in larger ones there are community groups and support groups, like BraveLab, that could be helpful for someone who is unsure or has recently discovered their sexual orientation. Projects like this provide a safe place for young people to share their stories and get advice and help.

*"If I want to reveal myself to my friends or family, but I'm afraid, then what?"* Your identity is something extremely personal, you don't owe anyone an explanation for who you are and how you define yourself. Your peace and your safety come first. It's never too late to reveal yourself. The important thing is to be ready and to remember that whatever reactions you may get, your identity **is valid**. As scary as coming out may sound, after every storm the sun rises. I can assure you that the weight that falls off your chest is liberating. It's important to feel comfortable and confident in your own skin. The best life you can live is one where you don't compromise yourself to please others.

In conclusion, when coming out to someone about your LGBTI+ identity, it's important to remember that reactions can change. If you encounter an aggressive or a negative reaction, stay calm and try to use the suggested safety tips. Get support from reliable people, keep proof and seek professional help, if necessary. Your life is important. Regardless of the reactions, you deserve respect and recognition.

