

A psychologist's guide to getting it right when someone comes out

Created by the experts at Online Psychologists Australia



INTRODUCTION When Someone You Love Comes Out

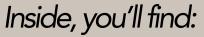
(A moment that matters more than you know)

Coming out isn't just about sharing an identity—it's about reaching for connection.

It's saying, "I trust you with my truth."

Whether you saw it coming or completely caught you off guard, your reaction in this moment will echo louder and longer than you might imagine. It can shape how your loved one sees themselves, how safe they feel in the world, and whether they take their next step with courage or with fear.

This guide was created by psychologists—and built from real conversations with real people—to help you get it right. It's not about being perfect. It's about being present, kind, and open.



- · Gentle, evidence-based advice
- What to say (and what to avoid)
- Tools for being a safe person—today and long into the future
- Stories and wisdom to remind you: you are not alone in this



Being supportive doesn't require all the answers. Just a willingness to learn, to listen, and to lead with love.

Let's begin, together.



What to do when someone comes out to you

(Even if you weren't expecting it)



It's okay to feel surprised. It's okay not to know what to say.

What matters most is this: **Stay open. Stay kind. Stay present.**

Say these things (if they're true):

- "Thank you for trusting me."
- "I'm really glad you told me."
- "I'm here for you."
- "I love you."

These words may seem small, but to someone who's been holding their breath for days, months—or years—they can be life-changing.











Maintain eye contact



Offer a hug (if it feels right)



Keep your voice warm and steady



Face them fully

Sometimes what you don't do—like flinching, avoiding eye contact, or changing the subject—is just as important.



Resist the urge to turn the moment into your moment

Avoid jumping into questions like:

- "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"
- "Are you sure?"
- "But what about [insert partner/crush]?"
- "Is this just a phase?"

Even if you're curious, even if you're shocked, curiosity can wait.

Right now, it's about them.



Your first reaction is a snapshot they'll never forget

People remember how they were made to feel the moment they came out.

If they were met with love and safety, that memory becomes a soft landing.

If they were met with judgment, fear or dismissal—it can take years to unlearn that hurt.



"Coming out is the most political thing you can do"

- Harvey Milk

Remember: This is just the beginning

Coming out isn't a one-time conversation. It's a process. Your support will matter not just today, but in the quiet days after—at family dinners, on social media, in how you speak to others about them.

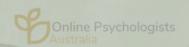
By showing up now, you're planting a seed of trust. Water it. Let it grow.

WHAT IF I MESSED IT UP ALREADY?

That's okay. You can still course correct. Try this:

"I've been thinking about what you shared, and I want to do better. I'm sorry if I didn't respond the way you needed. I care about you, and I'm learning."

It's never too late to become a safe space.





Because even loving words can land wrong



When someone comes out, they're handing you something fragile.

Even with the best intentions, certain phrases—often said in the moment, can cause unintended harm.

This section is here to help you **press pause before you speak** and think about what your words might sound like on the receiving end.

1. "Are you sure?"

This may come from curiosity or concern—but it can sound like doubt.

Try instead:

"Thank you for trusting me with something so personal. I'm really glad you shared this with me."

2. "It doesn't matter to me."

You may mean this to be supportive—but to the person coming out, it does matter. A lot.

Try instead:

"This matters because you matter. I'm proud of you for sharing it with me."

○ 3. "I love you anyway."

The word "anyway" implies their identity is something to tolerate, not embrace.

Try instead:

"I love you—full stop. Nothing about this changes that."

♦ 4. "I always knew."

This can sound dismissive, like their big moment was obvious, unimportant, or overdue.

Try instead:

"I didn't know for sure, but I'm honoured you felt safe enough to tell me."

○ 5. "This must be so hard for your [dad/grandma/church/etc]."

This shifts focus to other people's reactions—people who may not be safe or supportive.

Try instead:

"How are you feeling? What do you need right now?"

○ 6. "But you dated [insert ex]" or "You don't look gay."

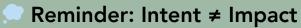
Avoid statements that link identity to past behaviour or stereotypes. Identity isn't always visible—and it's rarely linear.

Try instead:

"Thanks for helping me understand more about who you are."







Even kind people can say clumsy things.

What matters most is being willing to listen, reflect, and repair if needed.



"When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."

- Audre Lorde

If in doubt:

When words fail, love doesn't have to. Try this instead:

- Just listen
- Keep an open heart
- Be curious—later
- Keep learning



How to be a safe person

(Not for just a day, but always)

Because showing up once is good but showing up again and again is life-changing

Coming out is often imagined as one single conversation. But in reality, it's many moments, big and small—each one a chance to feel seen, loved, and safe.

This section is about what comes after the initial conversation.

Because being a true ally isn't a title, it's a practice.



Therapist Insight:

"Consistent, unconditional support builds psychological safety, one of the most powerful predictors of mental wellbeing."

Dr Michelle Olaithe,
 Clinical Psychologist



1. LEARN AT YOUR OWN PACE BUT NOT AT THEIR EXPENSE

It's okay not to know everything. But make space to learn on your own time—without making your loved one your only teacher.

Try:

- Following LGBTQIA+ creators and mental health professionals
- Reading about gender, sexuality and identity from inclusive sources
- · Listening without defensiveness if you slip up

2. AFFIRM OUT LOUD

Even if you've shown support once, don't assume it was enough.

Repeat things like:

"I'm proud of you."

"Your identity is valid."

"I love who you are becoming."

Affirmation works like sunlight on self-esteem: the more consistent, the deeper the growth.

3. USE THE NAME AND PRONOUNS THEY'VE SHARED

Every correct used = a quiet act of love. Every incorrect used = a moment of disconnection.

If you mess up:

"Oops—I meant [correct name/pronoun]. Thanks for your patience while I keep learning."

Self-compassion + accountability = the sweet spot.

4. STAND UP, EVEN WHEN THEY'RE NOT IN THE ROOM

What you do when someone isn't watching says everything.

- Don't laugh at "harmless" jokes.
- Correct friends or family when they misgender or make assumptions.
- Be the person who changes the conversation.

Advocacy isn't always loud, but it is active.

5. CREATE SPACE, NOT PRESSURE

Coming out isn't a finish line. Your loved one may still be figuring things out.

- · Let them take the lead
- Avoid pressuring them to be "out" in every space
- Support them even if things evolve (because they might!)



Therapy-backed tip: co-regulation matters

When a young person is exploring their identity, having emotionally attuned adults around them helps regulate stress, shame and anxiety.

That means:

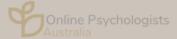
- Calm, open facial expressions
- Active listening
- Validating statements like "It makes sense you'd feel that way"

This builds trust and nervous system safety, the foundation of good mental health.

"I didn't realize how much me hiding my sexuality also meant that I hid a lot of just my identity as a person."

- Troye Sivan







If you're struggling with a loved one coming out

Because your feelings matter—but they're yours to work through

It's okay if your first reaction wasn't perfect.

It's okay if you're feeling surprised, sad, confused—or even grieving what you thought you knew.

But it's not okay to put those feelings on the person who just came out. This section is about separating your reaction from your response—so that even if your heart's still catching up, your love doesn't get lost in translation.

Therapist Insight:

"It's not uncommon for parents, friends or partners to feel shaken when someone comes out. These feelings are real but they're yours to process, not theirs to carry."

— Dr Michelle Olaithe, Clinical Psychologist



Step 1: Name what's happening inside you

Sometimes we feel discomfort or sadness not because we disapprove, but because we fear change, or mourn a version of the future we imagined.

Try this exercise:	
"I'm feeling	because I thought
would look different. That	doesn't mean I don't love them
—it just means I'm adjusti	ng."

Step 3: Take your discomfort to safe spaces

Your child/partner/friend is not your sounding board. But support does exist for you, too.

- Talk to a therapist
- Read about others' journeys (PFLAG, Minus18, QLife)
- Journal your questions without filtering
- Processing well is a sign of love

Step 2: Pause before asking for emotional reassurance

The person coming out cannot also carry your reaction. Don't say things like:

- "Why didn't you tell me sooner?"
- "But what does this mean for our family?"
- "How do you expect me to understand this?"

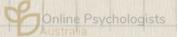
These responses might feel like honesty—but they often land as rejection.

Step 4: Make space for growth

Many adults feel discomfort not because of their values but because of their upbringing, faith, culture, or fear of what others will think. That's valid history but it doesn't have to define the future.

Growth isn't betrayal. It's evolution. And it's worth the effort.

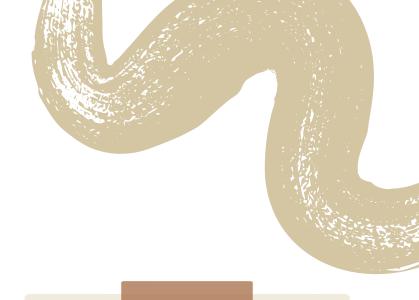




Therapy-backed idea: Practice "unconditional positive regard"

Coined by psychologist Carl Rogers, this idea means showing warmth, acceptance, and respect for someone *regardless* of whether you understand or agree with every detail. It's a proven foundation for emotional healing—and it starts with *presence without judgement*.

"Being gay is a part of who I am, and I can't separate it from my art. It's what makes me authentic." -Frank Ocean



Reframe your role:

You're not losing a child/partner/friend. You're being invited into a deeper, more authentic version of them.

This isn't the end of your relationship—it's a chance to show your love is bigger than expectation.



Let's Wrap This Up

A Safe Person's Pledge + Daily Affirmations

Because being a safe person is a daily decision—and every decision counts

You made it to the final page. That already says something powerful:

You care. You're trying. You're growing.

This last section is about turning intention into action with a gentle, visual reminder you can return to any time.

Your Safe Person Pledge

(Cut this out. Stick it on the fridge. Carry it in your wallet. Read it when you're unsure.)



I pledge to:

- · Respond with kindness, even when I feel surprised
- Create space, not pressure
- Use their name and pronouns—consistently
- Listen more than I speak
- · Learn without asking them to educate me
- Correct others when they misgender or make jokes
- Accept that identities evolve—and that's okay
- Let go of assumptions about their future
- Apologise when I get it wrong
- Remind them, again and again, that they are loved

Signed	:	
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Daily Affirmations for Safe People

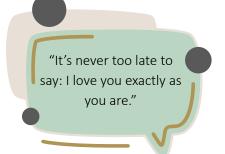
(Optional: Print and cut these as little notes to leave around the house or workspace.)











"Being a safe person is a gift I give—not one I expect to be thanked for."

"My loved one's identity is not about me—but my response can shape their wellbeing."





Where to get more support

Because you're not alone

AND you don't have to figure it out by yourself

Whether you're the one coming out or the one responding, there are moments when you might feel overwhelmed, confused, or in need of backup. That's not a failure—it's human. Here's where to turn for extra guidance, comfort, and support.

Speak with a psychologist (online, from anywhere in Australia)

Online Psychologists Australia offers inclusive, confidential, and affirming support for individuals, parents, partners, and families.

Book an appointment:

www.onlinepsychologist.com.au

LEARN MORE

- "Coming Out, Again and Again" Brené Brown Podcast (Unlocking Us)
- "The Gender Unicorn" Visual tool to understand gender identity, gender expression, and attraction
- The Trevor Project (US-based but helpful) thetrevorproject.org

LGBTQIA+ Support Services

QLife – Free anonymous chat or phone support

1800 184 527 (3pm-midnight, every day)

qlife.org.au

Minus18 – Youth-focused education and

events

minus18.org.au

Parents of Gender Diverse Children -

Support for caregivers

pgdc.org.au

PFLAG Australia – Peer support for families

and friends

pflag.org.au

In Crisis?

If someone is at risk of harm or needs urgent mental health support:

Lifeline – 13 11 14

Kids Helpline – 1800 55 1800 (ages 5–25)

Suicide Call Back Service - 1300 659 467

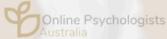
Emergency – Call 000





"What it says on your driver's license isn't really who you are—you are something much greater than that"

- RuPaul



One Last Note

You don't have to be a perfect ally.

You just have to be a loving, listening, learning one.

Your presence matters more than you know.

Thank you for choosing to show up. Again and again.





