

Being You



by Shelley Argent

Being You

This is a booklet written to assist those who may be questioning their sexual orientation and gender identity.

This is just a starting point for young people, like yourself, beginning the journey of self-awareness and discovery. We hope you will find the information useful.

For some young people this can be a time of great confusion, fear, and sometimes excitement. Feelings of confusion are common.

Some wonder why they feel different to their friends. Others are concerned about how people will react if or when, they find out.

Generally, the fear of coming out is worse than the reality. However, read as much as you can. Become informed, so if family or friends ask questions you can answer them.

But know that you are not alone. Sexual and gender diversity is common.

Common Questions

What does having a diverse sexuality mean?

ANSWER: Being gay or lesbian simply means the person has sexual feelings towards people of the same gender. Those with varying sexual identities may mean people are attracted to more than one gender (e.g. bisexual or pansexual), and some people may not feel sexual attraction at all (asexual).

Am I gay/lesbian, bi or pansexual?

ANSWER: Nobody else can tell you the answer. Some people may realise they are sexually diverse from an early age.

Others may realise over a long time. It can take ages to understand or accept your sexual diversity. But just be patient, don't stress and don't feel like you need to rush the process.

What does being transgender mean?

ANSWER: Being transgender or trans means a person's gender does not align with their assigned sex at birth. For example, if you were assigned male at birth but you feel like your gender identity is female, then you may be transgender. This can include gender diverse, non-binary, Sistergirl and Brotherboy gender identities amongst others.

Am I transgender?

ANSWER: Many people may know from a young age they are cisgender, which means their gender identity aligns with the sex they were assigned at birth, while others may recognise they are transgender.

Some people may take time to explore their gender identity, which relates to our/their personal sense of self. It's okay to take your time to figure things out.

Is it okay to be unsure?

ANSWER: Of course, it takes time to work out how you feel regarding diverse sexuality or gender identity. Just like anything else, some people will be

certain from a young age while others may be unsure and need time to figure it out.

What do I have to do to be sure I am gay, lesbian, bisexual, pansexual or transgender?

ANSWER: **For diverse sexuality...** Nothing! Straight people don't do anything to prove their sexuality and you don't have to either. Just be yourself and take your time. You don't need to rush into having sex with anybody to prove your sexual identity.

For diverse gender identity... All trans identities are valid identities and how you want to express yourself is up to you. Because there are many different ways people experience being trans some people may decide to socially transition or to get support from medical professionals.

In Queensland, people who are under 18 can get support from the Children's Gender Service (located at Queensland Children's Hospital). People who are over 18 can get support from Gender Services (located at RBWH) or the Australian Transgender Support Association of Queensland. Refer to the end of the booklet for further information.

For people who are unsure about their diverse sexuality or gender identity or want assistance, talking to a LGBTQ+ helpline or organisation can be a good place to start.

Is it just a phase?

ANSWER: For most of us, when we understand what our sexual orientation is, it often stays the same throughout our life. Some may be sexually fluid which means sexual attractions may change. Again this is normal and it's okay for people to explore these feelings.

Many people have a strong sense of their gender identity from as young as 2-4 years of age, although some people may need time to explore how they feel and identify. Some people may realise they are gender diverse during adolescence and others once they are adults, everyone is different.

Coming Out

What does 'coming out' mean?

ANSWER: 'Coming out' simply means when a young person feels comfortable within them self and decides to inform a friend or family member about their diverse sexuality or gender identity. Many people decide to come out when the time is right for them because they want to be honest and open about themselves.

Some will want to tell everybody they know all at once, while others may slowly tell family and friends. However, some may decide not to tell anybody. It is a personal choice and you should do what feels safe and right for you.

Is it best to be sure about my identity before coming out?

ANSWER: Who you talk to and when is your choice. It is suggested that young people wait until they feel ready to talk to somebody who they trust about how they are feeling. The main thing is to be comfortable in yourself when you decide to disclose your sexuality or gender identity to others.

Things to consider before coming out

Coming out or disclosing to loved ones is different for everyone. People may have positive or negative experiences. There are some things you may want to consider and ask yourself first.

- Do you know what you'd like to say? If not, do some research and see what others said or suggest and get ideas you think will work for you.
- Do you feel confident about your decision to come out? Remember self-questioning and feelings of uncertainty are common.
- Are you coming out because you want to or are you feeling pressured to? Remember, it is a personal choice, who you tell and when.

- Do you trust the person you want to tell? How do they feel about LGBTQ+ people?
- Do you feel comfortable and safe sharing this news with them? If the answer is 'no', wait until you have someone you can trust.
- Will the person be respectful of you and maintain privacy if you ask them to?
- Do you feel comfortable answering questions? If the answer is 'no' gather as much information as possible, including phone numbers of people they can talk to e.g. PFLAG+.
- Do you have support or someone you can go to if things go wrong?
- If you still live with your family and things don't go well, are you able to find other accommodation? Are you able to financially support yourself or get financial help?
- Can you find or contact any support services that can help you?

Have a plan about how you'd like to come out which includes the resources and supports you can use if needed.

How to tell someone

The time and place to tell someone may be different depending on who you are telling and how you want to tell them. It's about what feels right for you and the situation.

Make sure you feel comfortable and safe with the time, place, person and your approach in telling them.

Different ways of telling people about your identity include:

- a **letter, email or text message** – this can be good if you want them to know and want to have your thoughts and emotions stated clearly.
- a **phone call** can be good if you want to talk but feel uncomfortable, nervous, worried or shy about doing so in person.
- **talking together in person** can be a good way to tell someone however if using this approach:
 - choose a time when the person is free to talk and they aren't stressed. If they are tired or dealing with a problem, it may make it difficult for them to focus on being supportive. A calm, stress-free moment where there is lots of time to talk is a better option!
 - You may want to have a support person that you trust with you. This could be a family member or friend you trust.
 - If telling your parents*, try to choose a support person that your parents also know and trust.

An important thing to remember when telling parents, family members, friends or anyone else, is that you never apologise for who you are.

Telling parents or family members can feel like the hardest thing you ever have to do because you care about what they think and because they have known you the longest.

Parent* reactions and emotions

It can be helpful to think about the different types of reactions your family might have before deciding to talk to them about your sexual or gender diversity.

All families are unique and how they handle the news is varied but be prepared that there may be a combination of negative reactions and positive reactions!

Many families may react with happiness, love and support but some challenging reactions might include:

- **anger** – some parents may get angry as if you have done a deliberate thing to upset them. Avoid telling them during an argument.
- **denial** – some parents may pretend nothing has changed or refuse to acknowledge your diverse sexuality or gender identity; or keep changing the subject when you try to talk to them about it.
- **blame** – sometimes parents may try to blame friends, partners or themselves to explain what is happening.
- **fear** – parents may have fear about what will happen to you or how others will react. They may be frightened of losing you. Some may fear the unknown if they don't have an understanding about what you are telling them.
- **grief** - some parents may feel grief because they assume you will not be travelling the path they thought you would. For example, getting engaged, married and having children (you can still do all these things if you want). Or they may grieve the loss of the gender they thought you were.
- **uncertainty or no reaction** - sometimes family members may need time to process information and might not have much of a reaction at all, or they may try to be supportive but not really know what to say or do.

**When parents are shocked, they may say things
they don't mean or react in unusual ways.**

If parents have a negative reaction, try to stay calm and not take it personally. Reassure them that your intention was not to upset them, but to let them know about who you are and how you're feeling because you love them.

But don't apologise, you have done nothing wrong.

**Some parents may have tears but will still be supportive,
understanding and accepting.**

Some common questions and statements when parents are first told

Regardless of their levels of understanding and initial reactions, it can help to be prepared and plan how you will respond to questions, statements or misunderstandings made by your parents or family members.

- Are you sure it isn't just a phase? Are you just confused?
- How do you know? You haven't had a girlfriend/boyfriend/partner.
- You're too young to know.
- Is this because of your friends?
- Have we done anything wrong?
- Have you seen/will you see a doctor or counsellor?
- Why didn't you tell us sooner?
- We're glad that you told us.
- What can we do to support you?

Parents may need time and support

Remember, you may have been thinking about this for a while, but it is new information for your parents or family members.

They may be surprised or shocked and need time to process what you have told them, so they can understand what it means to them and to you.

Provide phone numbers of support groups, e.g. PFLAG+ and encourage family members to seek support if they struggle to understand your sexuality or gender identity.

Some just need help in learning how to best support you. PFLAG+ is a great support for parents.

It can be reassuring for some parents if you provide them with information and phone support lines to help them understand when informing loved ones about being LGBTQ+.

This also shows them you are serious about what you are telling them.

Remember, even if they are surprised, shocked or have some challenging reactions at first, many parents and family members will be understanding and supportive with time.

Telling friends

Remember, who you tell about your sexuality or gender identity is always your decision and you don't have to share this information unless you want to. You might decide to tell a friend, some of them, all of them or none of them! It's completely up to you.

If you do decide to come out to "straight" or cisgender friends about your diverse sexuality or gender identity, be positive and assertive. They may be surprised or shocked at first but give them time to adjust to the news. Remember, you have known about your diverse sexuality or gender identity for longer than they have. Most friends will be supportive.

If you do lose friendships because of your sexuality or gender identity, don't forget that there are many people who will celebrate who you are and value your friendship.

Some people may not understand but never lose sight of your own self-worth. When we tell friends, we aren't seeking permission, we're just being honest with them.

Remember to consider everything and develop a plan for coming out in case things don't go well. If friends do have a negative reaction, it's not okay for people to bully, abuse or discriminate against you so if you're still at school seek help from a Guidance Officer or a trusted teacher.

Looking after your emotional wellbeing

It's common for people to have many emotions during the coming out process. Telling (or not telling) family and friends about your sexuality or gender diversity may feel like the hardest thing you've ever had to do.

You may feel a range of emotions including:

- stressed
- scared
- anxious
- confused
- rejected
- isolated
- brave
- relieved
- calm
- liberated
- validated
- accepted

Consider who you can connect with to be able to safely talk about the coming out process and your experiences and feelings. You can have anonymous conversations with community groups that will be helpful.

You can also meet and make friends with other LGBTQ+ people at social support groups. Some organisations and support groups available in Queensland are listed in the next section, but there may be others near you.

Remember that there are many people with diverse sexualities or gender identities. Everybody has the right to decide when they want to "come out" and who they'd like to tell.

Don't feel rushed, pressured or made to feel guilty. It's okay to be you and to do what feels right for you.

Information & Support

Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays+ (PFLAG+): Emotional support for parents/carers and those in the process of “coming out.”

- www.pflagbrisbane.org.au
- Info@pflagbrisbane.org.au
- 0400 767 832

QLife: Free, anonymous peer support (phone or webchat) for LGBTIQ+ people across Australia available 3pm to midnight.

- www.qlife.org.au
- 1800 184 527

Open Doors Youth Service: Provides support to young LGBTIQAP+ Sistergirl & Brotherboy people aged 12-24 in SE QLD.

- www.opendoors.net.au
- opendoors@opendoors.net.au
- 07 3257 7660

Headspace: A range of services for young people aged 12-25 across Queensland. Some locations offer social support groups for LGBTIQ young people.

- www.headspace.org.au
- www.headspace.org.au/headspace-centres/

Queensland Council of LGBTI Health (QC): QC has a range of different services and programs for the LGBTIQ+ community relating to health and wellbeing. They can assist you if you're seeking specific information about any LGBTIQ+ issue.

- www.qc.org.au
- info@quac.org.au
- 07 3017 1777

The Queensland Children's Gender Service: The QCGS provides specialist care to support the health and wellbeing of Queensland diverse children under 18 years of age. A referral from a GP is needed.

- www.childrens.health.qld.gov.au/service-gender-clinic
- CHQ-Gender@health.qld.gov.au
- 07 3069 7377

Trans@School written by the Queensland Human Rights Commission: This resource provides information for support at school for young transgender people.

- www.qhrc.qld.gov.au
- info@qhrc.qld.gov.au
- 1300 130 670

** Throughout this resource, the word parent refers to someone who may be a biological parent, an adopted parent or another adult carer.*

About The Author, Shelley Argent (OAM)

Shelley was a stay at home mum to her two sons until 1995. In February 1995, Shelley commenced a Social Science degree at QUT. It was around this time James disclosed he was gay while still at high school.

After completing her degree, in 1998 Shelley began volunteering at the QLD AIDS Council as an education volunteer to gain an understanding of the 'gay community' as it was then called.

In 1999, Shelley reinvigorated PFLAG in Queensland, followed by advocating for equality in 2001. In 2006, Shelley was awarded an OAM for her work in the LGBTIQ community.

In 2007 Shelley was unanimously elected as National Spokesperson for PFLAG. In 2011 Shelley was awarded Queensland Senior Australian.



Shelley has written several educational resources to create understanding and support for families and the general community, and has received several Activist and Ally awards.

In 2010, Shelley had her story told on ABC television's "Australia Story", called Mum's the Word.

Aside from writing numerous PFLAG educational resources, Shelley has written two books, her first book "Opening the Door" was published in 2010. It's a personal story of how the family reacted when James came out.

Her second book, "Just a Mum" was published in 2019, which discusses her early life and then her activism. Shelley has been an active member of the LGBTIQ+ community for over 20 years.

About PFLAG+

PFLAG+ is a peer support group

We are 100% voluntary

We are non-secular

We have no political bias

We are not government funded - the group relies on private funding

PFLAG+ Offers

Anonymous telephone calls if preferred

Resources to promote understanding

Buddy support

Group meetings held bi monthly

Helpline - 0400 767 832

PFLAG+ goals

Support

The intention is to support families when a loved one first discloses they are LGBTIQ+. For many its a time of great confusion and fear.

Community Education

To provide general education which will increase understanding and acceptance of LGBTIQ+ by removing the myths and outdated beliefs.

Advocacy

To end discrimination and ensure equality for our LGBTIQ+ children have the same rights as their siblings and peers.

Inclusion

We have recently added the + sign because we want to be inclusive of everyone and how they identify.





Designed by
Big Buddha Boom

www.bigbuddaboom.com.au



www.pflagbrisbane.org.au