

allsorts of Coming Out



A '**Coming Out**' Resource for Young People who are **Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual (+)** or **Unsure/Questioning** their Sexual Orientation



Funded by



Welcome to the **Allsorts of Coming Out** resource, written by and for young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual+ (**LGB+**) or unsure of their sexual orientation.

In today's world, there are many out LGB+ children, young people and adults however most of us are still living in and growing up in communities where the norm is to be straight/heterosexual. We know that the reality for many people will be very different to the assumptions that are made about them so the young people of Allsorts Youth Project wanted to come together and share their **stories**, **ideas** and **tops tips** about what sexual orientation and coming out means to them.

You might be reading this thinking '***I don't know who I am yet***' or '***I came out a while back and think I might want to use a different term***' or, you might be certain that you are LGB+ but haven't told anyone yet.

Whoever you are, wherever you are on your journey, **this resource is for you**. It is a space to help you understand your own feelings, consider some of the ways in which you might want to talk about your experiences and have the confidence to share who you are with others if or when you feel ready. We know this resource won't give you all the answers and we know that your journey is going to be individual to you, but we hope this helps you along your path.

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What does *Sexual Orientation* Mean?



How sexual orientation is defined can be **different for every person**. Some people think of it as who we are sexually and romantically attracted to and who we have relationships with. Others may see it as describing the people we want to have sexual relationships with but we may not have a romantic connection, or vice versa.

The more we unpick what it might mean to us as individuals, the more it becomes easier to sort through. **Working out sexual orientation can be a confusing time**, particularly if the people around us assume who we might be attracted to. This sometimes happens when people look at our gender expression and think we might be attracted to a certain gender when in fact these are separate things. For example, someone may look at a masculine woman and assume that she is a lesbian or look at a feminine man and assume he is a gay. Equally, someone may look at a feminine woman or masculine man and assume they are straight.



The reality is that **assumptions are not always correct**. It can add unfair pressure and uncertainty to those who are exploring who they feel attracted to.

Many people see sexual orientation as a **spectrum** or **colour wheel** with lots of different ways of feeling attraction. This is can be really helpful as it means that there aren't the two assumed choices - gay or straight. It shows that there are **many ways we can explain and explore sexual orientation** and that it can be something fluid.



There are lots of different words that we could use to describe our sexual orientation and it might feel a bit mind boggling and overwhelming! Lesbian, gay, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, androsexual, straight, fluid and queer, to name a few.

There can be a lot of pressure to find a term that 'fits' you and explains who you are but remember, **there is no pressure to use a particular label** to explain your sexual orientation and no-one should force a label upon you.

You have the power to own the terms which feel right for you. Every person has a different journey of exploring who they are attracted to and it is a usual part of growing up. Our exploration of sexual orientation can be a personal one and at times can feel like we muddle through. We hope by sharing some of these journeys, you may find some similarities in what you are experiencing or have experienced so far.

Feeling Unsure?

Sometimes it can feel like we have to know who we are attracted to and know which term we want to use. **There is pressure**, particularly as teenagers, to know everything about ourselves and be ready to explain who we are to other people. The thing is, it can take time and **that is okay**.

Feeling unsure about who we are attracted to is a **normal part of growing up**, even though it might not be spoken about much. You might feel like in your school or other communities that everyone knows who they fancy and it is a hot topic of conversation. You might feel left out or not know how to participate in the conversation, or even feel pressured to share how you are feeling. This can be even more difficult if you are unsure or questioning your sexual orientation.



It might feel like a race to find out who you are and share it with the world but it is okay to take it slowly. There is no rush to announce who you are attracted to even if everyone else seems to be doing it. **Take your time, breathe, and go easy on yourself.**

Many people, young and old, have questions about their sexual orientation and through **talking, exploring** and **connecting** with others, you can find out a little more about who you are. Sometimes we might feel sure of who we are, come out as one thing and then realise, over time, that the term we are using doesn't fit any more. It does not make you any more or less valid to use different terms at different times. Part of the human experience is **constantly learning about ourselves**, and that includes sexual orientation.



I was scared to come out at first for a variety of different reasons. I went through lots of labels... lesbian, bisexual, asexual just to name a few... but eventually I found one that seemed to fit me. Coming out is not a onetime thing and coming out as pansexual was probably the best thing. I didn't feel I had this secret anymore and it was like a weight had been lifted. I'm no longer scared to come out; I'm proud of myself and my sexuality. If I had one piece of advice to give my younger self, it would be to not be scared; it's okay to take your time with coming out and if it changes over time that's totally okay and you are 100% valid!



Oakley, 24

What does *Coming Out* Mean?

Coming Out means telling other people about your sexual orientation.



Most of us are in a society where people generally assume that the default is straight. Coming out is saying **we are something different to that**. For people who are straight, usually they will not need to come out. However, for some trans people, the words they use to describe their sexual orientation may shift after they come out as a gender they previously didn't openly identify as.

For example, a trans woman assigned male at birth who is a **lesbian** (woman attracted to women) might have referred to herself as **straight** before coming out as trans. The language changes, but the **attraction stays the same**.

Coming out can also mean our own process of realising we are LGB+ and this can be **coming out to ourselves**. You might know that you are not straight and have come out to yourself as a lesbian for example. This in itself can sometimes be challenging or scary, but remember, once you have come out to yourself, **there is no rush to tell other people**.

Max, 16

 I used to insist and stubbornly say that I was only into girls, but as I've transitioned and **grown to accept myself**, I've realised that it's ok for me to also like boys. I learnt that it **doesn't make me less masculine** and it won't make me "camp". I think part of the reason I did this was because I wanted to know **exactly where I was with my sexual orientation**. Although it can be hard and confusing, there's **no rush to name your feelings**. It's good to be able to **accept change** with sexual orientation, just don't stubbornly stick like I did! Five years ago I came out for the first time and I've changed since, it's like peeling an onion layer by layer as I've discovered myself – sometimes the onion may make you cry but in the end it's tasty (unless you don't like onions). After coming out at school, I had become known as "the gay one" (or "the lesbian" for some) but it wasn't nice to have this factor determining my personality. If I could give advice to my younger self I would've told him to wait a bit, sometimes it's not worth it, and **it's ok to not be sure**.



Young People at Allsorts described coming out as:



**'Telling people who I
have always been'**



'TELLING PEOPLE I'M NOT STRAIGHT'



**'SHARING MY SEXUAL ORIENTATION
WITH OTHER PEOPLE'**



'BEING ABLE TO BE WHO I AM'



**'Telling someone you identify as
something different'**



**'BEING HONEST
ABOUT MYSELF'**

Staff at Allsorts described coming out as:



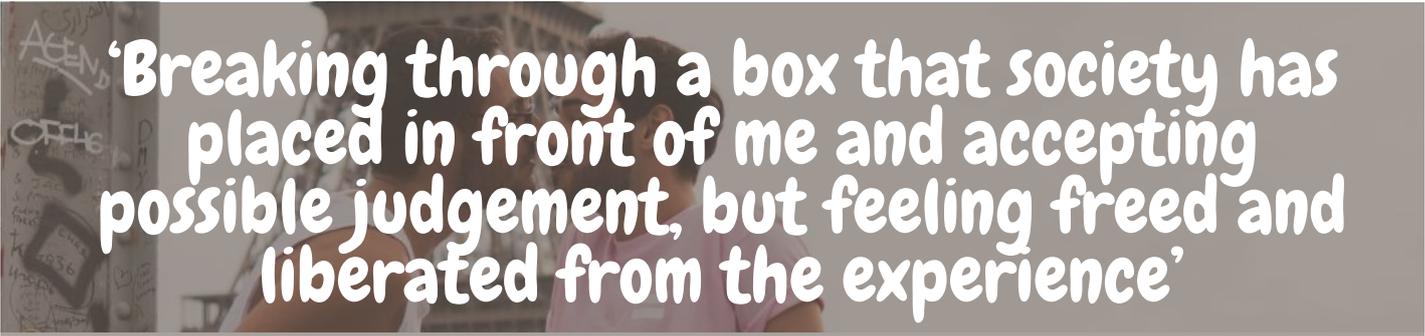
'MAKING A BOLD CHOICE TO LET SOMEONE KNOW YOU BETTER'



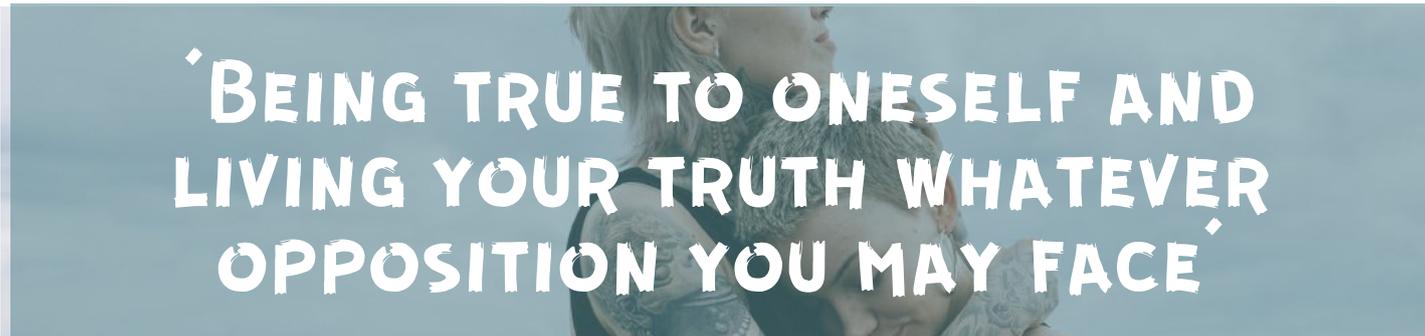
'BEING UNAFRAID OF WHO I AM AND MAKING IT EASIER FOR OTHER PEOPLE TO BE THEMSELVES'



'PUTTING TRUST AND FAITH IN THOSE AROUND ME TO LOVE ME UNCONDITIONALLY'



'Breaking through a box that society has placed in front of me and accepting possible judgement, but feeling freed and liberated from the experience'



'BEING TRUE TO ONESELF AND LIVING YOUR TRUTH WHATEVER OPPOSITION YOU MAY FACE'

Billie Jean

Deputy CEO of Allsorts



Thinking back, the first time I came out to someone was in the early 90s, I was around 18. I had **built up the courage over a few months** to tell my best friend at the time.

We had booked tickets to go to a gig at the O2 in London. Whilst travelling down to London on the train from the Northeast, I remember my stomach churning, **I was so nervous**. The gig was brilliant and after we went for a drink in one of the nearby pubs and it was the perfect opportunity.

I said Maxine I have something to tell you **'I am gay'** I remember filling up with so much emotion that I started to cry. Maxine started to also cry and I can still remember what she said. 'why didn't you tell me before you dafty?' I can remember **the weight lifted from my shoulders** it was such a **relief**. I knew that this was the beginning of me being honest with myself and my life would be so much **happier**.

This was only the beginning though **I had a lot more 'coming out' to do**. The most terrifying people that I had to tell was my siblings and my parents. My sister was really good about it and so supportive. One of my brothers found it hard as he has certain views which don't align with mine.





However, over time he has really made the effort and when I have had girlfriends he has been really supportive, especially if they like footy ha!!

Telling my parents was the hardest, I struggled with depression and anxiety worrying if they would accept me or not. I ran away from my life in the Northeast for a while when I was about 22 and worked in Spain for two years. This is when my mam found out about me and my sexuality. My mam came to visit me in Spain and my girlfriend at the time told my mam I was gay!! Stole my glory ha!! Looking back, I didn't mind, it had to happen. My mam held me and kissed me and said "Oh pet I've always known; don't worry I love you. Don't worry your dad will be ok" which was all I needed to hear.



What does Coming Out Feel Like?

Coming out will feel **different for everyone**, and can bring up a wide range of emotions, even for just one person! Coming out to a friend might feel different to coming out to a relative or employer, and that is **totally normal**. Some of the words that the young people and staff at Allsorts used to describe coming out were;

Awkward **PERSONAL** **Relief**
UNCOMFORTABLE **EXHAUSTING**
Safety **PRESSURED** **Unfair**
EXPOSING **TRUST** **Freedom**
Honesty **Journey** **Integrity**
Uncertainty **Transparency**
Anticipation **vulnerability** **Angry**
Liberating **Apprehensive** **FEAR**
Nervous **Stressful** **Repetitive**
Exciting **Rejection** **Validating**
CONFUSED **SCARY** **Truth** **Irritable**

Myth Busting

"You only come out once"

Many LGB+ people will come out **over and over again** throughout life. This might be at school, in college or university, at work, to family members, religious communities or online. Coming out is **not a one time thing** and as our relationship circles expand, as does the number of people we may come out to. Remember, **coming out is your choice**. You should never feel like you have to come out to people, and only do so **if you feel ready** to.



'It's just phase'

This is a phrase that many LGB+ people have heard over the years when coming out, **particularly when we are young**. Not only is this undermining our experiences but it also makes us feel invalid. For some people, using terms like LGB+ is a part of **exploration**. For others, it is **lifelong**. Whether coming out as LGB+ is exploration or permanent, we **must always be listened to** and **supported** no matter what words we use to describe our sexual orientation. If you are coming out as LGB+ and you change your mind later on, **that is valid**. If you come out as LGB+ and that's how you identify forever, **that's great too!** Both are valid and both are a part of learning more about who we are.

Isaac, 21

 In 2014, at the age of 15, I had the unfortunate realisation that I was slightly somewhat **utterly smitten with my best friend**. Since meeting him last year, the nagging crush had only grown and despite having had all this time, I had still been completely unsuccessful in deciphering his sexuality. It was because of this that 'coming out', to some extent at least, now felt **unavoidable**.

Of course, I couldn't just ask him directly, so my next best plan was to instead interrogate his friends and demand they take pity on my poor gay soul by keeping it secret. The first friend I asked had no idea, describing his sexuality as "the eighth wonder of the world: yet to be discovered". So I just tried another, and another, and another, until I had effectively 'come out' to the entire friendship group but him.

I had always considered my sexuality as simply being **my own business** so hadn't felt much desire to risk telling people before I had a reason to do so. And although I had never viewed this as keeping a secret, I couldn't have anticipated **how nice it would feel to be able to talk openly about it**, even if just to comment how dreamy a male character was while watching films (Ghibli's Howl <3). 

 Later that year, a jerk in class mockingly asked if I was gay and I replied that I was bi, effectively shutting him up. Around the same time my parents were asking me about potential girlfriends, and I told them that **it wouldn't have to be a girl and that I didn't think gender played a role in whether I fancied someone.**

Just like that, I had come out to my friends, family, and most people in the school were probably aware. Thankfully, I lived in Brighton and was lucky and privileged enough to be **surrounded by accepting people** who really didn't care one way or another if I was bisexual. Even though the romantic endeavour didn't pan out – I confessed to him before anyone else could and he tearfully told me that he was straight – **we're still good friends** and without this whole event, who knows when I'd have realised **how freeing it would be to come out.** 



Myth Busting

‘Being LGB+ is a choice’

Who we are attracted to, romantically and/or sexually, **is not a choice**. There is an assumption that we choose to be LGB+, when in reality we know that attraction is something that **occurs naturally without any choice**, just like it does with those who are straight. What we do choose is when and how we come out and who we come out to.



‘Bisexual and pansexual people can’t make up their minds and are greedy’

Being attracted to more than one gender identity **is not uncommon** and doesn’t mean that you haven’t ‘made a decision’ about who to be attracted to. It also has no impact on your commitment to a relationship. There is no rule that as humans we must be attracted to one gender and one other gender only.

Some people like apple juice, some people like orange juice, and **some people like both!** These people aren’t greedy, or unsure of what juice they like. They know they like both, **and that’s fine**. Why should this be any different when talking about our sexual orientation?

‘You’re too young to know’

You are likely to know yourself better than most. **We cannot put an age on when we start experiencing feelings for other people**, just like straight people. We may just have a different and sometimes more challenging process of realising who we are attracted to. Some of us have these feelings at an early age, maybe 11 or 12, and for others, it is much later on. Either way, you will have some awareness of your feelings and, if you feel **ready** and **safe** to, you should be given opportunities to share those with others, **regardless of how old you are**.



‘You can’t have a family if you come out’

Many LGB+ people **have families** and have grown their family in different ways. Sometimes we might be told that coming out will restrict our choices in life. However, many LGB+ people have **wonderful** and **fulfilling lives** and **many have happy families**.

It may be that accessing support to start a family feels a little more daunting, and we have to come out all over again to people who might have assumptions about us. But remember that **you are valid** and that **you have the right to have a family**, as much as any straight person does.

Effie

Fundraiser at Allsorts

 From a very young age I was bullied quite badly. I didn't know why I was different from everyone else, but by the age of around 9 or 10 it had been decided for me that I was gay by my peers, and in one case, a parent, who had equipped their kid with a plethora of homophobic language to hurl at me on a daily basis.

For the duration of school I wasn't out as a trans gal, and didn't fully grasp that I was one until later. So growing up (from the outside as an assumed straight cis guy), I experienced a lot of turmoil around my sexual orientation. Am I gay? Am I bi? Should I tell people? It had been ingrained in me that gay equals bad, and being the way I was brought negative attention.

So when I moved school I reinvented myself to hide it. I hid it well until I was about 16. I kissed a boy from my school on a Friday night and by Monday morning everyone in my year knew. I denied it for about a year before admitting it was true. I think as a result of experiencing such harsh responses to even the suggestion that I was bi or gay, I never really 'came out' in words. 



As I got a bit older, I was sometimes with women, sometimes with men, and sometimes with non-binary people. I was with whoever I wanted to be with and left the assumptions about my sexuality up to other people because eventually I just **stopped caring about what people think of my sexual orientation**. I've thought of myself as straight, bi, pan, gay, lesbian, asexual and it has shifted and morphed over the years. If asked, I use **queer** now because the experience of sexuality for me has never been fixed, and I don't think it ever will be **(and that's okay!)**.



Myth Busting

'Gay men are feminine and gay women are masculine'

Gender expression and sexual orientation are **completely different things**. How we express gender does not have an impact on who we are attracted to. It is a common **stereotype** that LGB+ people will dress and act in a certain way and whilst it is **absolutely okay** for you to fall into a stereotype, it is **not okay for people to assume** your sexual orientation based on the way you look.



Are some gay men 'feminine'? Yes. Are some lesbian women more 'masculine'? Also yes. But so are straight men, women, and non-binary people. And so are bisexual people, and everyone in between. We decide how we look because **we know how we feel comfortable**. We are LGB+, because **we know who we are attracted to**.



Top Tips

The Do's and Don'ts

Do ✓

- **Be kind to yourself**
- **Take your time** – there is no rush to come out
- Think about **how**, **when** and **who** you feel **safe** and **comfortable** coming out to
- **Get support** if you need it
- **Talk to other LGB+ young people** about their experiences
- Find **LGB+ role models** whether that be celebrities or people in your community
- Think about **who you trust**. Can you come out to them first?
- **Be patient** with yourself and with others
- **Make a plan with trusted people** about who you can talk to if coming out doesn't go how you anticipated
- **Prepare for questions** from other people
- Use the language and terms that **feel most appropriate to you**



Top Tips

The Do's and Don'ts

Don't ✖

- Panic! It is okay to be figuring this stuff out **in your own time**
- Come out if you don't feel **ready, safe** to or are feeling **pressured**
- Feel like you have to conform to **stereotypes** because others think you should
- **Assume** that everyone is aware of different language around sexual orientation
- Feel like you **need to** educate everyone on LGB+ issues
- Come out to everyone at once if you don't want to. **It can be a slower process** and **you control the speed**
- Feel **pressured to use a particular label** for your sexual orientation



Nathaniel, 23



I came out in the summer of 2017 and immediately had a **very mixed reception** among my friends especially as the area where I grew up was exceptionally conservative in both political and social values. As such, despite **preparing myself emotionally**, it was still an extremely difficult thing to do with some friends standing by me and others considering it 'unnatural' or in other cases fearing that I had been trying to seduce them during the entirety of our friendship.

In terms of **when I came out to myself**, to be honest it was just before I told a group of my school friends at the start of Summer 2017, as that was the no going back point. And this was also **nerve racking** as I had for the entirety of my high school life believed myself to be asexual and was honestly more than a little scared of the power and intensity that sexual desire seemed to have upon other humans.

This fear was strengthened by the fact that one of the advantages that allowed me to deal with mental issues from an early age was **self-awareness** and my ability to balance or suppress my emotions at will, and so an instinct which from all reports went beyond one's ability to gain mastery over, was truly a daunting prospect.





Having said this, since coming out I have been lucky enough to join **Allsorts** and engage with a **whole new community**, and the brilliant team supporting and running the organisation, so **definitely an experience that ended on the whole rather well..**



Coming out is an **individual process** although it is something that the majority of LGBT+ people have in common and tends to be unique to the LGBT+ community. **All coming out stories are different.** Some are wholly **positive** and some are **challenging**. Some are **painful** and some are **joyful**.

Whatever your journey, whether you are at the beginning or somewhere along the way, **we hope that you have found a story that you can connect with here.**

Who can you go to for help and advice?

If you live in **Sussex** or the **South East**, are **5-25**, **LGBTU+** and in need of support, **contact us** at **youth@allsortsyouth.org.uk**

For organisations outside of the South East area, visit **stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/whats-my-area**



01273 721211



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allsortsyouth.org.uk

Sexual Orientation Glossary

There are many ways and terms that people use to describe their sexual orientation. Language is **constantly changing** and **adapting**. This is not an extensive list of all terms people use to describe sexual orientation, but just a few that we think will come in handy. For our full glossary of LGBT+ terms, please visit: <https://bit.ly/387vXPx>

Ally

Someone who is a friend, advocate, and/or activist for LGBT+ people.

Androsexual

Someone physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to 'masculine' presenting people.

Aromantic

Experiencing little or no romantic attraction to others and/or has a lack of interest in romantic relationships/behavior.

Asexual

A sexual orientation generally characterised by not feeling sexual attraction or desire for partnered sexuality but some asexual people do have sex.

Biphobia

The fear, discrimination, prejudice or bullying of a person because they are bisexual or perceived to be bisexual by others.

Bi (Bisexual)

An individual who is physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to men and women.

Coming Out

The process of telling others about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Demisexual

Little or no capacity to experience sexual attraction until a strong romantic connection is formed with someone, often within a romantic relationship.

Fluid

Fluid(ity) describes an identity that may change or shift over time between or within the mix of the options available

Gay

The adjective used to describe people whose physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex.

Gynesexual / Sapphic

Someone physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to 'feminine' presenting people.

Outing

The act of publicly declaring (sometimes based on rumour and/or speculation) or revealing another person's sexual orientation without that person's consent.

Homophobia

The fear, discrimination, prejudice or bullying of a person because they are gay or lesbian or perceived to be gay or lesbian by others.

Lesbian

A woman whose physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay or as gay women.

Openly Gay/Lesbian/Bi

Describes people who self-identify as lesbian, gay or bi in their personal, public and/or professional lives.

Pansexual

People who's sexual orientation expresses acceptance of all gender possibilities including transgender and intersex people, not just two.

Queer

Traditionally a pejorative term, queer has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves (should only be used if someone self-identifies that way).

Questioning

The process of considering or exploring one's sexual orientation and/or gender identity.

Sexual Orientation

The term for an individual's physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction. Lesbian, Gay, Bi, Pansexual are all examples of sexual orientations.

Straight / Heterosexual

Used to refer to individuals who identify as a heterosexual, meaning having a sexual, emotional and/or physical attraction to individuals of the "opposite" gender/sex.



Brought to you by **Allsorts Youth Project** and generously funded by **Brighton & Hove City Council's** Youth Led Grants Programme.

Allsorts **listens** to, **supports** and **connects** children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans or unsure of their gender identity and/or sexual orientation.

If you live in **Sussex** or the **South East** and are in need of support, contact us at **youth@allsortsyouth.org.uk**



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