

**UNDERSTANDING THE IMPACT OF OPPRESSION
ON LGBT PEOPLE
ACTIVITY: Coming Out Stars**

PARTICIPANTS : All groups, especially non-queer or "straight" participants; counselors, service providers and Help Line operators.

OBJECTIVES

- To "walk in the shoes" of an LGBT person who is 'coming out' and understand the reality of loss for LGBT people.

TIME : 45-60 minutes

ACTIVITY OVERVIEW

STEP 1: Create an appropriate space by helping participants personalize the reality of loss and/or rejection.

STEP 2: Prepare the stars for the activity.

STEP 3: Lead participants through the challenges involved in 'coming out'.

STEP 4 : Discuss people's reactions to the risks and losses associated with coming out.

MATERIALS

- 5 point stars for the whole group in 4 different colours, Blue, Yellow, Red, and Green.
- Pencils/pens for participants. use

FACTSHEETS

- None.

PREPARATION : Read Section 2.2 Understanding the Impact of Oppression.

SOURCE : Adapted from *Coming out Stars*, Source Unknown

STEP 1 : Create an appropriate space by helping participants personalize the reality of loss and/or rejection. Ask participants to discuss a time when they had bad news to tell someone. Give people only long enough to share stories, about 5-7 minutes.

Tell participants: *Think about a time in your life when you had "bad news" about your or a family member. Turn to the person nearest to you. Tell them :*

- *How did you feel about having to share your "bad news" with others? (You don't have to tell your partner what the 'bad news' was.)*
- *Who did you have to tell? How did people react?*
- *What gave you strength to carry on?*

Tell participants that the next activity will help them understand the challenges that LGBT people face when they 'come out' or share information about their sexual orientation with others.

STEP 2 : Prepare the stars for the activity. Pass out BLUE, YELLOW, GREEN and RED stars, one for each person. Try to distribute approximately the same number of stars for each colour. Make sure each participant has a pen or pencil.

Continued on next page

STEP 2 (continued) : Tell participants how to prepare their stars. Say: *Write your name in the middle of the star.*

- 1. Think about a friend who is very close to you who you care about very much. Write your friend's name on one of the 5 points.*
- 2. Think of a specific family member (chosen or biological family) you turn to in times of need or for advice, someone who cheers you up when you're sad, or who has made a big impact on your life. Write this person's name on a star point.*
- 3. Think of a community group that you belong to, a religious community, a neighbourhood, a community group, etc. Write the name of this group on a star point.*
- 4. Identify their ideal job, this may be where you work now, or where you would like to work in the future. Write the name of your ideal job on a star point.*
- 5. Think about some of your hopes and dreams. These may be personal, educational, career goals, etc. List a few hopes and dreams on the last point.*

STEP 3 : Lead participants through the challenges involved in 'coming out'. Have the participants arrange all the chairs in a circle. Say:

All of you are LGBT. You have known about your sexual orientation for some time, but you have kept that information secret until now. Starting today, you are going to 'come out' and share that information with others. Let's find out what happens to you. (Now read the following 5 steps out loud)

1. You have decided that it will be the easiest to **come out to your friends first**, since they have always been there for you in the past and you trust them.
 - If you have a **BLUE** star, your friend has no problem with your news. They thank you for being honest with them and act no differently towards you, accepting you for who you are. Do nothing with your star.
 - If you have a **YELLOW or GREEN** star, your friends are hesitant and annoyed you've waited so long to tell them. But, you are confident that they will eventually accept you and understand that being LGBT is a part of who you are. If you have a yellow or green star fold back the point of your star with your friend's name.
 - If you have a **RED** star, your news is met with anger and disgust. This friend who has always been at your side tells you that being LGBT is wrong and that they cannot associate with anyone like that. If you have a red star please tear off the point with your friend's name and drop it to the ground. This friend is no longer a part of your life.

2. Most of you have had good luck with your friends and you decide that **your family** probably deserves to know. You turn to your closest family member.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, you are embraced by this family member. They are proud that you have decided to come out and tell you that they will always be there to support you. Do nothing to your star.
- If you have a **GREEN** star, the conversation does not go exactly as you had planned. Questions are asked as to how this could have happened, but following a long discussion your family member becomes a bit more at ease with your news. Fold back the point of your star with the name of your family member. This person will be an ally, but only with time.
- If you have a **YELLOW or RED** star, your family member rejects the thought of being related to a person who is LGBT. Much like some of your friends your family member is disgusted. Some of you who have **YELLOW or RED** stars are thrown out of your house and become part of the 20-40% of homeless youth who identify as LGBT. If you have a **YELLOW or RED** star, please tear off the point of your star with the name of family member and drop it to the ground.

3. Having told your friends and family, members of **your community** soon begin to become aware of your LGBT identity.

- If you have a **GREEN or BLUE** star, your LGBT identity is accepted by your community. Do nothing with your star.
- If you have a **YELLOW** star, you receive a mixed response. Some people in your community accept you. Some don't know what to think. You remain a part of the community and, with time, you will fit in as you once did. If you **YELLOW** star, please fold back the point with the name of the community group.
- If you have a **RED** star your community reacts with hatred. They tell you that someone like you doesn't belong in their community. Those who had supported you in times of need no longer speak to you or acknowledge you. If you have a red star, tear off the point with the name of the community group.

4. You have heard that rumours are starting to circulate **at work** regarding your LGBT identity. In the past you confronted these rumours, but in this instance, you don't have the chance.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, your coworkers begin to approach you and let you know that they have heard the rumours and that they don't care, they will support you. Your bosses react the same way, letting you know that you do good work and that's all that matters. Do nothing with your star.
- If you have a **GREEN** star, the atmosphere in your workplace becomes interesting. Everyone appears to think you are LGBT, even though you haven't confirmed the rumours. Some people speak to you less than they did before, but nothing changes drastically. Do nothing with your star.

- If you have a **RED or YELLOW** star, you continue to work as though nothing is happening, ignoring the rumours that have spread throughout the workplace. One day, you come in to find that your office has been packed up. You are called into your boss' office and she explains that you are being fired. When you ask why, she tells you that lately you work has been less than satisfactory and that she has to make some cutbacks in your area. If you have a **RED or YELLOW** star, please tear off the point with the name of your ideal job and drop it to the ground.

5. Now your future lies ahead of you as an LGBT individual. Your **hopes and dreams** your wishes for the perfect life. For some of you these are all that remain.

- If you have a **GREEN, BLUE or YELLOW** star, these hopes and dreams will keep you going. Most of you have met with some sort of rejection since beginning your coming out process, but you have managed to continue to live a happy and healthy life. Your personal hopes and dreams become a reality.
- If you have a **RED** star, you fall into despair. You have been met with rejection after rejection and you find it impossible to accomplish your lifelong goals without the support and love of your friends and family. You become depressed and with nowhere else to turn, many of you begin to abuse drugs and alcohol. Eventually, you feel that your life is no longer worth living. If you have a red star, please tear it up and drop the pieces. You are now part of the 40% of suicide victims who are LGBT identified.

STEP 4 : Discuss people's reactions to the risks and losses associated with coming out.

Ask participants:

- *How did you feel as the activity progressed? How realistic is this activity?*
- *What is the long-term impact of these losses for someone who is LGBT?*
- *What kind of support do LGBT people need in order to come out? Where can this support come from?*

Ask if there are any questions.

****Helpful hints. In order to really show the reality of the coming-out process, you should have very few **Blue** stars. This is because while for some LGBT this positive reality of complete acceptance is a reality it is a very small population which experience this. I would suggest only 2 blue stars depending on the size of your group****