

SESSION 4: COMING-OUT TO OTHERS

OBJECTIVES

1. Participants will identify the advantages and disadvantages of coming-out to other people.
2. Participants will learn a model for coming-out to other people.
3. Participants will improve their skills in weighing the costs and benefits of coming-out.
4. Participants will improve their planning of the disclosure: what to say; the best method; timing; anticipated reactions; obtaining support.
5. Participants will improve their problem-solving abilities in a coming-out situation.

RATIONALE

While disclosing to family and friends can lead to reduced isolation, repair of a damaged self-concept, a sense of relief, better understanding, the availability of healthy adult models, and more support—to name some advantages, it can also lead to abandonment, hurt, violence and loss of physical and emotional support. Sometimes it is better not to disclose. Furthermore disclosure can be planned and executed in a way that reduces negative consequences and enhances positive outcomes. Therefore, teaching gay and lesbian youth 1) how to determine if they should come-out and 2) how to disclose to family and others is an important endeavor.

Practicing safer sex is made easier if there are social supports which endorse those efforts. Coming-out can provide those supports. Furthermore, if coming-out is a large unresolved problem for a teenager, it will be hard to focus on safer sex issues.

PROCEDURES

1. Introduction of group members and the day's topic.
2. Checking Feeling Thermometer readings.
3. Review of successes that occurred between sessions.
4. Giving out of tokens.
5. Teach participants how to determine what the advantages and disadvantages of coming-out are through a script and small group work. Also examine the consequences of coming-out.
6. Present a step by step model for planning coming-out to the family. The model includes weighing whether the potential outcome is worth it.
7. Practice constructing the message, considering how to come-out, and evaluating the timing through small group tasks.
8. Practice how to deal with parental comments and feeling during coming-out by having each participant recommend to another teenager what to say.

9. Practice responding to longer term needs of parents through individual advice giving on what to do.
10. Role play coming-out to a family.
11. Role play giving and receiving advice on whether to come-out at school.

MATERIALS

Tokens
 Feeling Thermometers
 Script of Mary Lou and Barbara
 Pens and Newsprint
 Handout: The Steps to Take in Coming-out to Your Family
 Coming-out practice cards
 Handout: Greg and His Family: Coming-out
 Handout: What Should Greg Do If.....
 Handout: What Should Greg Say When.....
 Instructions to Jackie

Exercise 1: Introducing Each Other and the Session

GROUP LEADER SAYS

Welcome back. Today's session is about coming-out to other people.

We are going to practice how to do that in the most successful way possible.

Coming-out can generate all kinds of feelings.

Speaking of "feeling," how do you feel now on the Feeling Thermometer?

OBTAIN READINGS.

First, I want us to make sure we know who is in the group.

As we go around, please tell us your first name and tells us how you are like a gay man or lesbian woman that you admire.

The person can be someone famous that we all know about or someone closer to you.

To give you an idea of what I mean I'll go first.

I'm your group leader, and my name is _____.

I admire _____ , and here is the way I am like _____

_____.

HAVE EACH PERSON GIVE HIS/HER NAME AND HOW SHE/HE IS LIKE AN ADMIRERED GAY OR LESBIAN PERSON. HAVE THE CO-GROUP LEADER GO LAST.

Here are some tokens for you to pass out to other group members during this session.

Every time you appreciate what another person said or did or even simply their being here, give them a token.

PASS OUT TOKENS TO GROUP MEMBERS.

Now let's take a few minutes and tell us what you did between sessions that kept you away from the HIV or that made your life a little bit better.

GO AROUND AND HEAR REPORTS. GIVE OUT TOKENS.

Those were really good reports!

What about the homework?

Did you discuss why it is great being gay and lesbian with a friend?

How did it go?

OBTAIN RESPONSES AND DISCUSS.

As I said earlier, today we'll deal with coming-out to other people.

As you know, the goal of all these sessions is to help you reduce your exposure to HIV.

If you already are HIV positive, then the goal is for you to learn how to live a high quality life and to help you keep from spreading the virus around.

Today's objective is to be skilled at dealing with coming-out issues.

Exercise 2: The Advantages and Disadvantages of Coming-out

Let's introduce coming-out to others with a script.

Who will read Mary Lou and who will read Barbara?

SELECT THE VOLUNTEERS AND GIVE THEM THE SCRIPT TO READ.

Mary Lou and Barbara

MARY LOU: I want to talk to you.

BARBARA: Is this going to be one of those big sister-little sister talks?

MARY LOU: I'm serious.

BARBARA: So what is it?

MARY LOU: I think I'm a lesbian.

BARBARA: I don't want to hear about it.

MARY LOU: But I want to tell you.

BARBARA: What you do in private is your business. The same as what I do in private is my business. What do you have to make a big announcement for?

MARY LOU: I think it will be helpful to tell you.

BARBARA: I just don't get it. How come gays and lesbians feel compelled to tell everybody?

MARY LOU: You're not everybody.

BARBARA: Did I ever tell you I was heterosexual? Did I announce to Mom and Dad that I was heterosexual? Do I confide in my friends that I'm heterosexual?

MARY LOU: It isn't the same thing. Everyone is assumed to be heterosexual.

BARBARA: What's the point?

THE END

In this scene Mary Lou is the younger sister, and Barbara is the older sister.

So go ahead and read the scene.

HAVE THE VOLUNTEERS READ THE SCRIPT.

Thank you. That was great!

GIVE OUT TOKENS.

So what did you think of this scene between sisters?

OBTAIN REACTIONS.

Many times straight people do not understand why anyone would want to confide that they are gay or lesbian.

They don't think it is necessary to reveal this information, and often they think that it is in poor taste to do so.

Why would you want to tell your family or friends that you are gay or lesbian?

What are the advantages and disadvantages?

I am going to divide the group in half, and I want one group to make a list of advantages and the other to make a list of disadvantages.

Make a list and put it on newsprint.

DIVIDE THE GROUP INTO TWO SMALLER GROUPS. GIVE MARKING PENS AND NEWSPRINT. ALLOW FIVE MINUTES FOR MAKING LISTS.

OK, what have you come up with?

We'll start with the advantages.

HAVE THE GROUP REPORT. LOOK FOR ADVANTAGES SUCH AS 1) SO THAT OTHERS WILL UNDERSTAND YOU AND YOUR WAY OF LIFE BETTER—LIVE TOGETHER, SLEEP TOGETHER, TAKE CARE OF YOUR PARTNER. 2) OTHERS CAN APPRECIATE YOUR FEELINGS—JOY, REJECTIONS. 3) CAN BE HONEST WITH OTHERS. 4) CAN OPENLY ATTEND GAY AND LESBIAN FUNCTIONS. 5) CAN REDUCE DISTANCE FROM FAMILY. 6) CAN EXPERIENCE LESS STRESS AND SELF DISLIKE. 7) DON'T HAVE TO LEAD A SPLIT LIFE.

That was very good.

GIVE OUT TOKENS.

Are there any more ideas people want to add?

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES.

Now we'll hear from the other group who worked on disadvantages.

HAVE THE OTHER GROUP REPORT BACK. LOOK FOR DISADVANTAGES SUCH AS 1) REJECTION BY FAMILY, FRIENDS, SCHOOL, AND PEOPLE AT WORK. 2) LOSE PLACE TO LIVE AND OTHER SUPPORTS. 3) VIOLENCE. 4) ISOLATION. 5) LOSE SELF-ESTEEM. 6) COULD LEAD TO FEELING DEPRESSED AND SUICIDAL.

Thank you for that presentation.

PASS OUT TOKENS.

Are there other ideas people want to add?

PUT NEW RESPONSES UP ON THE NEWSPRINT.

OK, we can see some of the reasons to come-out and those against it.

Exercise 3: A Model to Follow In Coming-out

I am going to show you a step by step approach to coming-out, and then we will practice it.

At first, the emphasis will be on coming-out to the family.

Later we will work on coming-out in other settings.

HAND OUT "THE STEPS TO TAKE IN COMING-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY."

THE STEPS TO TAKE IN COMING-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY

DECIDE IF YOU REALLY WANT TO COME-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY

Step 1: Answer the question, "Will my parents accept me afterwards?"

To find out consider:

- What are my parents' attitudes toward sex?
- What are my parents' attitudes toward gays and lesbians?
- What are my parents' attitudes toward minority groups?
- How strongly do my parents believe in traditional religious beliefs and are their religious beliefs tied to their feelings about heterosexuality?

- How strong is my relationship with my parents?

Step 2: Answer the question, "Are you prepared to deal with the consequences if you have guessed wrong about your parents' reactions? For example, what if you get kicked out?"

Step 3: Answer the question, "Why do I want to come-out to my parents?"

To find out consider:

- Do I want to hurt them?
- Do I want to provoke a fight with them?
- Do I want to test them?
- Do I want them to reject me?
- Do I want to inflict pain on myself?
- Do I want to make our relationship better?
- Do I want to have an honest relationship?

Step 4: Put the answers to the questions all together and decide if coming-out to your parents is worth it.

IF THE ANSWER IS "YES"

DECIDE HOW TO COME-OUT TO MY PARENTS

Step 5: Decide on the words you are going to use.

To select the right words consider:

- Are the words clear and simple? "I'm a lesbian and I feel good about that."
- Is the message positive? "I want to share who I really am with you."
- What do you want from your parents? Support? Awareness?
- What are the effects of apologizing? "I'm sorry, but I'm gay."
- What are the effects of blaming? "If you had been around more when I was a kid, I wouldn't be a lesbian."
- What words will show your care for your family?

Step 6: Decide how you are going to present the message.

- By Letter
- On the telephone
- Face to face
- By another person telling them
- (Sooner or later you'll probably need to face them.)

Step 7: Decide how you will handle a face to face meeting.

To prepare yourself consider:

- Where do you want people to be sitting or standing?.
- How you will handle questions? "Won't you be fired?" "Will people think you are crazy?"
- What will you say when you are asked to promise things? "Just promise me one thing—that you never introduce me to your lover."
- Where you will set the limit? "Tell me how you make love to another girl."
- Should you bring someone else along for support?
- How will you end the conversation?

Step 8: Decide on when to come-out to your parents.

To make decisions about when to come-out consider:

- Will there be plenty of time for discussion? Not during a football game or birthday party.
- Is the family already in some kind of financial, medical, or emotional crisis?
- Should you delay until after you have moved out in the near future?
- Could you handle being cut off financially or emotionally at this time?

Step 9: Figure out how your family is likely to react and what you will want to do about those reactions.

To figure out how your family is likely to react consider:

- What if your parents are very angry?
- What if your parents blame themselves?
- What if your parents deny that you really are gay or lesbian?
- What if your parents are ashamed?
- What if your parents express grief as in the case of a death?
- What if your parents want to send you to a psychiatrist?
- What if your parents want to keep you in the house or prevent you from seeing your friends?
- What if you are thrown out of the house? Where will you go? How will you get money?
- If your parents become very negative, how will you find emotional support?
- If your parents are very upset, how could you help them find support?

Step 10: Plan how you could help your family get used to the idea that you were gay or lesbian.

To develop a plan consider:

- How would you show your parents that you are still their son or daughter and not a stranger?
- How would you answer your parents questions about what it means to be gay or lesbian?
- What help could your parents get from the parents of other gay and lesbian adolescents?
- How would you continue to demonstrate that you came out to your parents because you cared about them and wanted both your parents and yourself to be happy?

Step 11: Plan how you will survive if your family throws you out.

To develop a plan consider:

- Where can you stay in an emergency?
- How will you feed yourself?
- Who can you call to help you?
- Where will you get money?

Step 12: Practice coming-out to your family by role playing with others whom you trust. Have your friends play your family.

Step 13: COME-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY!

(Adapted from Often Invisible by M. S. Schneider, 1988, Toronto: Central Toronto Youth Services)

I want to go over the step-by-step approach.

GO OVER THE MODEL, READING EACH PART ALOUD WITH GROUP MEMBERS ALSO READING DIFFERENT STEPS. MIX IT UP SO THAT YOU AND THE CO-LEADER READ A FEW AND THE GROUP MEMBERS READ A FEW.

Exercise 4: Deciding To Come-out

Now we are ready to practice this step by step approach.

We'll start with deciding if it is worth coming-out to your family.

To work on deciding whether to disclose, I am going to pass a card to each person.

The person who passes the card is Abby in "Dear Abby."

The person who gets the card will read the letter to Dear Abby.

Then, Abby, you respond.

You'll get the idea as we go along.

PASS OUT THE CARDS ONE AT A TIME. WAIT FOR AN ANSWER TO EACH CARD BEFORE GOING ON TO THE NEXT CARD. ENCOURAGE OTHER GROUP MEMBERS TO SHARE HOW THEY MIGHT RESPOND AS WELL. GIVE OUT TOKENS AS YOU GO ALONG.

CARDS ON WHETHER TO COME-OUT

FRONT, CARD 1, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY DEEP

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS ARE BOTH PRUDES. THEY HATE SEX. SEX IS FOR MAKING BABIES—NOT PLEASURE. SEX IS FOR AFTER MARRIAGE ONLY. I'M 15, AND I'D LIKE TO SEE MY PARENTS' FACES WHEN I TELL THEM I'M A LESBIAN. SHOULD I GO AHEAD?

SIGNED, SHIRLEY

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 1

EXAMPLE:

DEAR SLIPPERY,

YOUR PARENTS WILL BLOW A GASKET, AND IT SOUNDS LIKE THAT MAY BE WHAT YOU WANT. IS IT REALLY WORTH IT? I DOUBT IT.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 2, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY WISE

DEAR ABBY,

I THINK MY PARENTS WILL ACCEPT ME WHEN I TELL THEM I AM GAY, EVEN THOUGH MY FATHER IS A POLICEMAN AND USED TO "TRAP QUEERS," AS HE CALLS IT. I'D SIMPLY FALL APART IF THEY KICKED ME OUT OF THE HOUSE. I AM GOING AWAY TO COLLEGE IN TWO MONTHS. I ASSUME IT IS O.K. TO GO AHEAD AND TELL THEM. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SIGNED, GUESSING GUS

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 2

EXAMPLE:

DEAR GUESSING,

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU MAY BE WRONG ABOUT YOUR PARENTS' ACCEPTING YOU. AND YOU SAY YOU COULDN'T TAKE BEING THROWN OUT. WAITING MAY BE YOUR BEST ANSWER FOR NOW.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 3, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY HONEST

DEAR ABBY,

I LOVE MY PARENTS, BUT BECAUSE I AM GAY AND HAVEN'T TOLD THEM, WE SEEM TO BE DRIFTING APART. I CAN'T SHARE WITH THEM LIKE I USED TO. MY DAD WOULD BE UNHAPPY BUT HE'D GET OVER IT. MY MOM WOULD BLAME HERSELF. SHE PLAYS THE MARTYR ABOUT EVERYTHING. I KNOW SHE'D STILL FUSS OVER ME. I WANT TO COME-OUT. DO YOU SEE A REASON NOT TO?

SIGNED, CARING CLAUDE

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 3

EXAMPLE:

DEAR CARING,

YOU WANT TO COME-OUT IN HOPES THAT IT WILL MAKE THINGS CLOSER WITH YOUR PARENTS. YOU THINK THEY WILL HAVE A TOUGH TIME BUT CAN TAKE IT. PREPARE YOURSELF AND GIVE IT A TRY.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 4, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY NEAT

DEAR ABBY,

MY FATHER IS VICE-PRESIDENT IN A BANK AND DOES NOT CARE MUCH FOR MINORITIES. MY MOTHER IS ACTIVE IN THE RIGHT-TO-LIFE MOVEMENT. THEY HAVE ALWAYS SPOILED ME. I AM A LESBIAN AND STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL. MY LOVER IS ABOUT 25. I DON'T THINK MY PARENTS WOULD LIKE LESBIANS, BUT THE WAY THEY HAVE GIVEN ME EVERYTHING SAYS THEY WOULD STILL CARE FOR ME. MY LOVER WANTS TO COME WITH ME FOR SUPPORT WHEN I COME-OUT. DOES THIS SOUND O.K. TO YOU?

SIGNED, CONFIDENT CAROLYN

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 4

EXAMPLE:

DEAR CONFIDENT,

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU ARE UNDERESTIMATING YOUR PARENTS' DISLIKE FOR LESBIANS AND REACTIONS TO YOUR COMING-OUT? WOULD YOUR PARENTS TRY TO STICK IT TO YOUR LOVER? WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE SENT AWAY TO SCHOOL OR MIGHT THEY DISOWN YOU? AFTER ALL THE SO CALLED SPOILING THEY HAVE DONE, BEING VERY, VERY ANGRY AND WANTING TO FIX THINGS WOULD NOT BE A SURPRISE. TRY RE-THINKING YOUR PLAN TO COME-OUT.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 5, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO HAS LOTS OF COURAGE

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS ARE BOTH DIVORCED. FIRST, MY FATHER WAS CHEATING ON MY MOTHER, AND LATER, SHE HAD A LOVER. THEY ARE PRETTY EASY GOING. I HAVEN'T TOLD THEM I WAS GAY BECAUSE IT WOULD HURT THEM. THEY ARE BOTH SO SEXUAL THAT FOR ME TO BE GAY WOULD MEAN THEY DID SOMETHING WRONG. IN CERTAIN WAYS, THEY HAVE BOTH LEFT ME. I WOULD LIKE TO COME-OUT TO THEM TO SEE IF THEY REALLY CARE. IS THERE A PROBLEM ABOUT DOING IT?

SIGNED, TESTING TOM

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 5

EXAMPLE:

DEAR TESTING,

IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT WOULD REALLY DEVASTATE YOUR PARENTS TO TELL THEM YOU ARE GAY, BUT WHAT WOULD YOU DO ABOUT THEIR HURT? WHY DO YOU WANT TO TEST THEM? WHAT WILL YOU DO IF THEY DON'T COME UP TO WHAT YOU WANT? BEFORE COMING-OUT, WHY NOT EXPLORE YOUR REASONS FOR DOING IT A LITTLE MORE?

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 6, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY FRIENDLY

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS REALLY PISS ME OFF. THEY CARE SO MUCH FOR APPEARANCES. IF THEY KNEW I WAS GAY, THEY'D BE SO ASHAMED THAT THEY WOULD MOVE TO ANOTHER PLACE AND ACT LIKE I WASN'T THEIR SON. I'D LOVE TO TELL THEM I WAS GAY. THEY WOULD FREAK OUT. THEN THEY WOULD SCREAM AND YELL AT ME AND I COULD TELL THEM WHAT I REALLY THINK OF THEM. ALL THE VEINS IN THEIR NECKS WOULD GET BIG AND POPPED OUT. IT ISN'T TOO CRUEL TO TELL THEM—IS IT?

SIGNED, FURIOUS FRED

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 6

EXAMPLE:

DEAR FURIOUS,

THEY'D GET UPSET; YOU WOULD HAVE STARTED A BIG FIGHT, AND THEN WHAT? WHAT IS THE ADVANTAGE TO ALL THIS? IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THEIR VALUES WITHOUT ATTACKING THEM, FINE, BUT IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA TO KEEP BEING GAY OUT OF IT UNTIL YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE ABOUT DISCUSSING A LESS SENSITIVE AREA.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 7, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY GENEROUS

DEAR ABBY,

MY FATHER DIED SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS A FRESHMAN IN HIGH SCHOOL. MY MOTHER HAS NOT REMARRIED OR DATED. I NOTICE SHE SPENDS A LOT OF TIME WITH SEVERAL WOMEN FRIENDS—ONE IN PARTICULAR. THIS GIVES ME THE COURAGE TO TELL HER I AM A LESBIAN. I THINK SHE NEEDS MY SUPPORT AND I KNOW IT WOULD BE NICE FOR ME TO TALK TO HER ABOUT MY FEELINGS AND MY NEW LOVER. I CAN'T DO THAT NOW. MOST AREAS OF MY LIFE ARE GOOD AND I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF. SHOULD I TAKE THE RISK OF COMING-OUT TO MY MOTHER?

SIGNED, HOPEFUL HARRIET

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 7

EXAMPLE:

DEAR HOPEFUL,

WHY NOT TAKE THE RISK? YOUR MOTHER SOUNDS RECEPTIVE TO HEARING WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY, BUT DON'T STEREOTYPE HER RELATIONSHIPS. IF YOU ARE RIGHT THAT SHE NEEDS YOU AND YOU NEED HER, THE BENEFITS OF COMING-OUT MIGHT BE GREAT.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 8, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY THRIFTY

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS ARE PRETTY RIGID AND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN STRICT WITH ME. I GOT SPANKINGS A LOT. EVEN THOUGH I AM SIXTEEN, THEY WOULD PUNISH ME IF I TOLD THEM I THOUGHT I WAS GAY. I HAVE NO ONE TO SHARE MY SECRET WITH. IT IS DEPRESSING TO THINK THAT THERE IS NO WAY OUT. THEY'LL FIND OUT SOME HOW. I MIGHT AS WELL GET IT OVER WITH. TAKE THE BEATINGS AND HOPE I SURVIVE. WHATEVER HAPPENS IS MY FATE ANYWAY. DON'T YOU THINK I SHOULD TELL THEM?

SIGNED, SUFFERING SAM

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 8

EXAMPLE:

DEAR SUFFERING,

DON'T DO IT! IN A FEW MORE YEARS YOU'LL BE OUT OF THERE. HIDE BEING GAY UNTIL YOU LEAVE. WHAT IS THE SENSE OF INFLECTING PAIN ON YOUR SELF? SOME PLACE IN YOUR COMMUNITY THERE IS A GROUP OR PROGRAM FOR GAY AND LESBIAN TEENAGERS. FIND IT! GET SOME SUPPORT TO HELP YOU WHILE YOU WAIT FOR GRADUATION. HERE ARE HELPFUL PHONE NUMBERS, LIBRARIES, BOOKSTORES, COMMUNITY BASED AGENCIES, HEALTH SERVICES, AND HOT LINES.

SIGNED, ABBY

That was really good.

So we have worked on deciding whether coming-out is worth it.

Exercise 5: What to Say, Where and When

I want you to imagine that you have a friend named Greg.

He needs your help in coming-out to his family.

Here is a fact sheet which tells us a little bit about Greg and his family.

First, we will go over the fact sheet.

Then we can work on how to plan for coming-out.

GREG AND HIS FAMILY: COMING-OUT

Greg is black and gay.

He has hidden being gay from everyone except another teenager who lives in a different city. He sees him twice a year.

Greg plays on the basketball team at high school and is an average student.

Greg likes music and is wild about dancing.

He wants to tell his parents he is gay because he respects them and needs them to respect him too.

Greg has two older brothers—one in construction and the other in college.

Earl is Greg's father. He works in the post office and wants Greg to be a pro-basketball player.

Earl is six foot six and goes to church with his wife once a month.

He plays poker with his friends once a week on the weekend.

Harriet is Greg's mother. Her mother—Granny White—sometimes lives with them when she isn't in the hospital.

His mother is active in her church and works in a Head Start program.

Harriet likes to be busy and doesn't mind volunteering, working, taking care of the house and cooking.

She is devoted to Greg.

Greg thinks both his parents will be quite upset when he tells them, but that they'll recover.

He thinks his father will be upset because Greg won't fit the black macho image, and he'll be ashamed that a son of his is gay.

He thinks his mother will feel guilty and will see her dream of his growing up to be a model son disappearing. She'll also worry about his getting AIDS.

Greg believes their love for one another will win out although it may take a long time.

It is one month from the end of the basketball season, and it is Greg's junior year of high school.

THE END

PASS OUT THE FACT SHEET AND GO OVER IT.

So Greg has decided to go ahead and come-out to his family.

I'm going to divide you into three work teams.

DIVIDE THE GROUP INTO THREE TEAMS.

The first group's job is to figure out what Greg should say to his parents.

The message should be clear and simple.

It should avoid apologizing and blaming.

Also make sure that what Greg wants from his parents is stated as well.

That is step 5 on the handout which tells you the steps to take.

What is the message?

The second group's job is to figure out how Greg should handle the situation.

Greg has decided he wants to tell them face to face.

So where should he tell them?

Should they be seated or standing?

How should he handle questions?

What questions shouldn't he answer?

Should he bring someone to help him out?

How should he end it?

Those are the kinds of questions you need to give Greg advice on.

This is handling step 7.

The third group is to focus on the timing issue—step 8.

What is a good time to have this discussion?

Should it be on the weekend or weekday?

Near the holidays?

Are there financial, medical, or emotional issues which help to determine when to do the talking?

So you in the third group need to think about what to tell Greg in terms of timing.

Go ahead and get started. You have five minutes to work on your advice to Greg.

ALLOW 5 MINUTES OF PREPARATION. THEN CALL THE GROUPS BACK AND HAVE EACH ONE PRESENT IN THIS ORDER: MESSAGE, HANDLING IT, AND TIMING. GIVE OUT TOKENS. USE THE HANDOUT "THE STEPS TO TAKE IN COMING-OUT TO MY PARENTS" AS A GUIDE FOR PRESENTATION ISSUES AND DISCUSSION.

Let's hear what the group working on the message came up with.

PRESENT. GIVE OUT TOKENS.

Are there other ideas?

OBTAIN IDEAS AND DISCUSS.

Next the group dealing with how to handle the situation.

PRESENT. GIVE OUT TOKENS.

Are there other ideas about handling the situation?

OBTAIN IDEAS AND DISCUSS.

Now for the group on timing.

What did you come up with?

PRESENT, REVIEW, LOOK FOR NEW IDEAS AND DISCUSS.

You all did very well.

Exercise 6: Dealing with Family Reactions

Now Greg has to get ready for what reactions his parents will give him when he finally tells them he is gay.

How would you advise Greg if his parents said certain things?

Remember you have the advantage now of helping him prepare without the difficult situation actually taking place.

So think it through.

I going to pass out a page with different reactions from his parents.

Each person will indicate what he or she would tell Greg to say or do if that happened.

After each person has a turn, the rest of you can tell us what you liked and what you would have done differently.

PASS OUT "WHAT SHOULD GREG DO IF....." GO AROUND, READ WHAT IS SAYS ON THE PAGE, AND HAVE EACH PERSON RESPOND IN ORDER. AFTER EACH RESPONSE, GET FEEDBACK. GIVE OUT TOKENS AS APPROPRIATE.

WHAT SHOULD GREG DO IF.....

1. HIS FATHER SAYS, "ARE YOU GOING TO WEAR LACE PANTIES ON THE BASKETBALL COURT?"
2. HIS MOTHER CRIES AND CRIES.
3. HIS FATHER SHOUTS AT HIM, "NO SON OF MINE IS GOING TO BE A FAGGOT!"
4. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "OH, SON, I DON'T WANT YOU TO GET AIDS."
5. HIS FATHER SAYS, "I LOVE YOU, GREG. YOU'VE BEEN A FINE SON. THAT'S WHY I KNOW YOUR
HEAD MUST BE TEMPORARILY SCREWED
UP. YOU'RE NO MORE QUEER THAN I AM."
6. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "HOW WILL I EVER BE ABLE TO GO TO CHURCH AGAIN AND HOLD MY HEAD
UP HIGH?"
7. HIS FATHER SAYS TO HIS MOTHER, "HARRIET, THIS IS YOUR FAULT. I TOLD YOU THAT YOU WERE
TOO EASY ON THE BOY."
8. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "DON'T TELL ME THAT, SON. I FEEL LIKE I'M LOSING YOU FOREVER."
9. HIS FATHER SAYS, "I'M GOING TO CALL YOUR COACH AND TELL HIM WHAT YOU JUST SAID.
MAYBE HE CAN TALK SOME SENSE INTO YOU."
10. HIS FATHER SAYS, "THERE ARE PLENTY OF BLACK MEN OUT THERE DOING THEIR THING. BE A
PIMP, BE A HUSTLER, RUN THE NUMBERS, SELL DOPE, BUT DON'T BE A FAGGOT."
11. HIS FATHER TAKES A SWING AT HIM.
12. HIS FATHER AND MOTHER THROW HIM OUT OF THE HOUSE.

That was very good.

Are there other situations that Greg might have faced which we need to talk about?

OBTAIN OTHER EXAMPLES AND HAVE GROUP MEMBERS INDICATE WHAT ADVICE THEY WOULD GIVE.

Exercise 7: Advice on Helping the Family Get Used to It

Let's say that Greg told his parents and it did not go well, but it wasn't terrible either.

They show some signs of getting used to it, but Greg wants to help them out.

This time I want you to give Greg advice on making it easier on his parents.

I'll pass out a page with some "what ifs" on it.

You tell Greg what he should do if his mother or father said or did what the page tells you.

PASS OUT "WHAT SHOULD GREG SAY WHEN....."

WHAT SHOULD GREG SAY WHEN.....

1. HIS MOTHER ASKS, "WHAT KIND OF LIFE DO GAY MEN LEAD? IT MUST BE PRETTY SLEAZY."
2. HIS FATHER SAYS, "HOW COME GAY MEN ARE ONLY INTERESTED IN SEX?"
3. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "I WOULD LIKE TO MEET ANOTHER GAY BOY THAT YOU KNOW."
4. HIS FATHER SAYS, "I AM TRYING, BUT IT'S HARD FOR ME TO RESPECT YOU AFTER YOU TOLD ME ABOUT BEING GAY."
5. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "SOMETIMES I WONDER IF YOU TOLD US ABOUT BEING GAY BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO HURT US OR BECAUSE YOU WANTED TO NOT LIVE A LIE WITH US."
6. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "I WISH THERE WAS SOMEONE YOUR DAD AND ME COULD TALK THIS OVER WITH. I WOULDN'T TRUST MOST PEOPLE TO TALK TO ABOUT THIS."
7. HIS DAD ASKS, "DO YOU GET TURNED ON BY OTHER GUYS IN THE LOCKER ROOM?"
8. HIS MOTHER ASKS, "DO YOU THINK BEING GAY HAS MADE YOU LESS OF A GOOD PERSON?"
9. HIS FATHER ASKS, "DO YOU KNOW ANY BLACK, PROFESSIONAL ATHLETES THAT ARE GAY?"
10. HIS MOTHER SAYS, "I DON'T KNOW HOW YOU CAN CALL YOURSELF A CHRISTIAN AND BE GAY."

We'll go around and one at a time you tells us what advice you would give Greg.

After each person has responded we'll stop and get some feedback: what did you like and what would you do differently.

HAVE EACH PERSON READ THE STATEMENT OUT LOUD AND THEN GIVE GREG SOME ADVICE. AFTER EACH PERSON HAS GONE ALLOW THE OTHER GROUP MEMBERS THE OPPORTUNITY TO GIVE FEEDBACK.

GIVE OUT TOKENS.

That was very good. Thank you.

Exercise 8: Greg and His Parents—a Rehearsal

Now that we have practiced the different steps in coming-out to your parents, let's try a role play with Greg and his parents.

Who will play Greg, who will be his father—Earl, and who will be his mother—Harriet—

SELECT VOLUNTEERS AND GIVE THEM INSTRUCTIONS.

Greg, your goal is to tell your parents that you are gay, trying to keep their respect.

So what is your goal—

HELP GREG ARTICULATE HIS GOAL.

Earl, your goal is to make sure that Greg really isn't gay.

What is your goal, Earl?

HELP EARL STATE HIS GOAL CLEARLY.

Harriet, you are the mother, and you want to make sure that you don't lose your boy—particularly to the world of homosexuals.

What is your goal, Harriet?

HELP HARRIET ARTICULATE HER GOAL.

Everyone else is observing and needs a specific task.

ASSIGN OBSERVER'S TASKS.

You observe their facial expressions
voice tone
posture
words
gestures
voice level
eye contact

HAVE THE PLAYERS SIT SPREAD OUT A BIT SO THE PARENTS ARE NOT RIGHT TOGETHER.

OK, let's start the role play.

ALLOW THE ROLE PLAY TO GO ON FOR A FEW MINUTES. IF YOU WANT TO PUT NEW PLAYERS IN AS THE SCENE PROGRESSES, THAT IS FINE. GIVE OUT TOKENS AT THE END.

That was really good.

Greg, tell us what your Feeling Thermometer reading was, what you liked about your performance, and what you would do differently.

ENCOURAGE RESPONSE.

We'll do the same for Earl and Harriet.

Tell us your Feeling Thermometer levels, what you liked and would do differently.

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES.

Now we'll get some feedback from the observers.

Tell us what you observed, what you liked, and what you would have done differently.

OBTAIN FEEDBACK FROM OBSERVERS AND DISCUSS THE ROLE PLAY.

Exercise 9: Coming-out at school

We have been working on coming-out to parents.

Let's turn our attention to another setting: school.

Imagine that this is a community hangout run for gay and lesbian teenagers.

Who will be Jackie? And who will be her three friends?

SELECT VOLUNTEERS.

I am going to give Jackie some instructions.

PASS OUT INSTRUCTIONS TO JACKIE.

INSTRUCTIONS TO JACKIE

YOU ARE A SOPHOMORE IN HIGH SCHOOL AND YOU ARE A LESBIAN.

YOUR SCHOOL IS PRETTY HARSH ON GAYS AND LESBIANS. SOME KIDS HAVE BEEN BEAT UP.

NO ONE AT YOUR SCHOOL HAS OPENLY COME-OUT.

THERE ARE FIVE KIDS YOU LIKE, AND YOU BELIEVE THAT ONE IS GAY AND ONE LESBIAN—BUT NO ONE SAYS ANYTHING. YOU DON'T HAVE A LOVER.

ONE TEACHER THAT YOU LIKE IS RUMORED TO BE LESBIAN AND YOU RESPECT HER A LOT.

YOUR SCHOOL HAS A GREAT SCIENCE PROGRAM, AND THAT'S IMPORTANT TO YOU BECAUSE YOU WANT TO BE A DOCTOR. YOU WANT TO KEEP GOING THERE.

YOU ARE THINKING OF TELLING YOUR TEACHER FRIEND AND A FEW OTHERS AT SCHOOL THAT YOU ARE A LESBIAN. IT MAKES YOU MAD TO HAVE TO HIDE. ALSO YOU HOPE BY COMING-OUT YOU MAY MEET SOME OTHER LESBIANS

YOU HAVE A PROBLEM: YOU ARE NOT SURE WHAT TO DO ABOUT COMING-OUT.

TALK TO YOUR FRIENDS AT THE CENTER ABOUT IT.

She will read them, and then I want you to help her solve her problem.

Remember that there are some steps in problem solving:

1. define the problem.
2. find out what is important.
3. look for at least three solutions.
4. weigh the advantages and disadvantages of each solution.
5. choose a solution.
6. try it.
7. see how it came out and how to do better.

The rest of us will observe the role playing.

ASSIGN OBSERVER TASKS.

Each person will watch for something different.

You watch for... did they define the problem?
did they explore what was important to Jackie?
did they think of a bunch of solutions and weigh their pros and cons?
did they help Jackie choose a solution?

Are you ready, Jackie?

OK, let's start the role play.

ALLOW THE ROLE PLAY TO GO LONG ENOUGH TO HAVE DISCUSSED THE SITUATION THOROUGHLY.

First, I'd like to ask Jackie and her friends, how did you feel on the Feeling Thermometer?

OBTAIN RESPONSES.

You were a problem solving group.

Jackie, what did you like about their help and what would you have done differently?

OBTAIN RESPONSE.

From the three problem solvers, what did you like about what you did and what would you do differently?

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES.

Now let's hear some feedback from the observers.

What did you observe, what did you like, and what would you do differently?

ENCOURAGE RESPONSES AND DISCUSS THE ENTIRE ROLE PLAY. IF THE POINT WAS NOT MADE IN THE DISCUSSION, MAKE THE POINT THAT THERE ARE TIMES WHEN COMING-OUT IS NOT THE SMART THING TO DO AND THERE IS NOTHING WRONG IN HIDING THAT YOU ARE GAY AND LESBIAN. ONLY YOU CAN BE THE JUDGE OF WHAT IS BEST FOR YOU. EXPLORE WHAT "HIDING" MEANS TO PARTICIPANTS IN THE GROUP. DISCUSS THE PROS AND CONS IN THE PROCESS OF NOT TELLING SOMEONE.

Today we have practiced dealing with the issues around coming-out.

For homework, find a gay or lesbian friend who has not come-out.

Talk with that friend about what you have learned here today.

See if you can help your friend sort things out.

Our time is about up.

Before we stop, there are two final activities.

First, what are your Feeling Thermometer readings?

OBTAIN READINGS.

Second, we want to give appreciation to each other for the way people contributed to today's session.

GIVE APPRECIATION TO EVERYONE. MAKE SURE EACH GROUP MEMBER GETS SOME STROKES.

Thank you for today.

New time we meet at _____ (time) on _____ (day).

END OF SESSION 4

THE STEPS TO TAKE IN COMING-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY

DECIDE IF YOU REALLY WANT TO COME-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY

Step 1: Answer the question, "Will my parents accept me afterwards?"

To find out consider:

- What are my parents' attitudes toward sex?
- What are my parents' attitudes toward gays and lesbians?
- What are my parents' attitudes toward minority groups?
- How strongly do my parents believe in traditional religious beliefs and are their religious beliefs tied to their feelings about heterosexuality?
- How strong is my relationship with my parents?

Step 2: Answer the question, "Are you prepared to deal with the consequences if you have guessed wrong about your parents' reactions? For example, what if you get kicked out?"

Step 3: Answer the question, "Why do I want to come-out to my parents?"

To find out consider:

- Do I want to hurt them?
- Do I want to provoke a fight with them?
- Do I want to test them?
- Do I want them to reject me?
- Do I want to inflict pain on myself?
- Do I want to make our relationship better?
- Do I want to have an honest relationship?

Step 4: Put the answers to the questions all together and decide if coming-out to your parents is worth it.

IF THE ANSWER IS "YES"

DECIDE HOW TO COME-OUT TO MY PARENTS

Step 5: Decide on the words you are going to use.

To select the right words consider:

- Are the words clear and simple? "I'm a lesbian and I feel good about that."
- Is the message positive? "I want to share who I really am with you."
- What do you want from your parents? Support? Awareness?
- What are the effects of apologizing? "I'm sorry, but I'm gay."
- What are the effects of blaming? "If you had been around more when I was a kid, I wouldn't be a lesbian."
- What words will show your care for your family?

Step 6: Decide how you are going to present the message.

- By Letter
- On the telephone
- Face to face
- By a another person telling them
- (Sooner or later you'll probably need to face them.)

Step 7: Decide how you will handle a face to face meeting.

To prepare yourself consider:

- Where do you want people to be sitting or standing?.
- How you will handle questions? "Won't you be fired?" "Will people think you are crazy?"
- What will you say when you are asked to promise things? "Just promise me one thing—that you never introduce me to your lover."
- Where you will set the limit? "Tell me how you make love to another girl."
- Should you bring someone else along for support?
- How will you end the conversation?

Step 8: Decide on when to come-out to your parents.

To make decisions about when to come-out consider:

- Will there be plenty of time for discussion? Not during a football game or birthday party.
- Is the family already in some kind of financial, medical, or emotional crisis?
- Should you delay until after you have moved out in the near future?
- Could you handle being cut off financially or emotionally at this time?

Step 9: Figure out how your family is likely to react and what you will want to do about those reactions.

To figure out how your family is likely to react consider:

- What if your parents are very angry?
- What if your parents blame themselves?
- What if your parents deny that you really are gay or lesbian?
- What if your parents are ashamed?
- What if your parents express grief as in the case of a death?
- What if your parents want to send you to a psychiatrist?
- What if your parents want to keep you in the house or prevent you from seeing your friends?
- What if you are thrown out of the house? Where will you go? How will you get money?
- If your parents become very negative, how will you find emotional support?
- If your parents are very upset, how could you help them find support?

Step 10: Plan how you could help your family get used to the idea that you were gay or lesbian.

To develop a plan consider:

- How would you show your parents that you are still their son or daughter and not a stranger?
- How would you answer your parents questions about what it means to be gay or lesbian?
- What help could your parents get from the parents of other gay and lesbian adolescents?
- How would you continue to demonstrate that you came out to your parents because you cared about them and wanted both your parents and yourself to be happy?

Step 11: Plan how you will survive if your family throws you out.

To develop a plan consider:

- Where can you stay in an emergency?
- How will you feed yourself?
- Who can you call to help you?
- Where will you get money?

Step 12: Practice coming-out to your family by role playing with others whom you trust. Have your friends play your family.

Step 13: COME-OUT TO YOUR FAMILY!

(Adapted from Often Invisible by M. S. Schneider, 1988, Toronto: Central Toronto Youth Services)

CARDS ON WHETHER TO COME-OUT

FRONT, CARD 1, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY DEEP

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS ARE BOTH PRUDES. THEY HATE SEX. SEX IS FOR MAKING BABIES—NOT PLEASURE. SEX IS FOR AFTER MARRIAGE ONLY. I'M 15, AND I'D LIKE TO SEE MY PARENTS' FACES WHEN I TELL THEM I'M A LESBIAN. SHOULD I GO AHEAD?

SIGNED, SHIRLEY

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

FRONT, CARD 2, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY WISE

DEAR ABBY,

I THINK MY PARENTS WILL ACCEPT ME WHEN I TELL THEM I AM GAY, EVEN THOUGH MY FATHER IS A POLICEMAN AND USED TO "TRAP QUEERS", AS HE CALLS IT. I'D SIMPLY FALL APART IF THEY KICKED ME OUT OF THE HOUSE. I AM GOING AWAY TO COLLEGE IN TWO MONTHS. I ASSUME IT IS O.K. TO GO AHEAD AND TELL THEM. WHAT DO YOU THINK?

SIGNED, GUESSING GUS

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 1

EXAMPLE:

DEAR SLIPPERY,

YOUR PARENTS WILL BLOW A GASKET, AND IT SOUNDS LIKE THAT MAY BE WHAT YOU WANT. IS IT REALLY WORTH IT? I DOUBT IT.

SIGNED, ABBY

BACK, CARD 2

EXAMPLE:

DEAR GUESSING,

IT SOUNDS LIKE YOU MAY BE WRONG ABOUT YOUR PARENTS' ACCEPTING YOU. AND YOU SAY YOU COULDN'T TAKE BEING THROWN OUT. WAITING MAY BE YOUR BEST ANSWER FOR NOW.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 3, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY HONEST

DEAR ABBY,

I LOVE MY PARENTS, BUT BECAUSE I AM GAY AND HAVEN'T TOLD THEM, WE SEEM TO BE DRIFTING A PART. I CAN'T SHARE WITH THEM LIKE I USED TO. MY DAD WOULD BE UNHAPPY BUT HE'D GET OVER IT. MY MOM WOULD BLAME HERSELF. SHE PLAYS THE MARTYR ABOUT EVERYTHING. I KNOW SHE'D STILL FUSS OVER ME. I WANT TO COME-OUT. DO YOU SEE A REASON NOT TO?

SIGNED, CARING CLAUDE

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

FRONT, CARD 4, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY NEAT

DEAR ABBY,

MY FATHER IS VICE-PRESIDENT IN A BANK AND DOES NOT CARE MUCH FOR MINORITIES. MY MOTHER IS ACTIVE IN THE RIGHT-TO-LIFE MOVEMENT. THEY HAVE ALWAYS SPOILED ME. I AM A LESBIAN AND STILL IN HIGH SCHOOL. MY LOVER IS ABOUT 25. I DON'T THINK MY PARENTS WOULD LIKE LESBIANS, BUT THE WAY THEY HAVE GIVEN ME EVERYTHING SAYS THEY WOULD STILL CARE FOR ME. MY LOVER WANTS TO COME WITH ME FOR SUPPORT WHEN I COME-OUT. DOES THIS SOUND O.K. TO YOU?

SIGNED, CONFIDENT CAROLYN

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 3

EXAMPLE:

DEAR CARING,

YOU WANT TO COME-OUT IN HOPES THAT IT WILL MAKE THINGS CLOSER WITH YOUR PARENTS. YOU THINK THEY WILL HAVE A TOUGH TIME BUT CAN TAKE IT. PREPARE YOURSELF AND GIVE IT A TRY.

SIGNED, ABBY

BACK, CARD 4

EXAMPLE:

DEAR CONFIDENT,

IS IT POSSIBLE THAT YOU ARE UNDERESTIMATING YOUR PARENTS' DISLIKE FOR LESBIANS AND REACTIONS TO YOUR COMING-OUT? WOULD YOUR PARENTS TRY TO STICK IT TO YOUR LOVER? WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE SENT AWAY TO SCHOOL OR MIGHT THEY DISOWN YOU? AFTER ALL THE SO CALLED SPOILING THEY HAVE DONE, BEING VERY, VERY ANGRY AND WANTING TO FIX THINGS WOULD NOT BE A SURPRISE. TRY RE-THINKING YOUR PLAN TO COME-OUT.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 5, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO HAS LOTS OF COURAGE

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS ARE BOTH DIVORCED. FIRST MY FATHER WAS CHEATING ON MY MOTHER, AND LATER SHE HAD A LOVER. THEY ARE PRETTY EASY GOING. I HAVEN'T TOLD THEM I WAS GAY BECAUSE IT WOULD HURT THEM. THEY ARE BOTH SO SEXUAL THAT FOR ME TO BE GAY WOULD MEAN THEY DID SOMETHING WRONG. IN CERTAIN WAYS THEY HAVE BOTH LEFT ME. I WOULD LIKE TO COME-OUT TO THEM TO SEE IF THEY REALLY CARE. IS THERE A PROBLEM ABOUT DOING IT?

SIGNED, TESTING TOM

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

FRONT, CARD 6, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY FRIENDLY

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS REALLY PISS ME OFF. THEY CARE SO MUCH FOR APPEARANCES. IF THEY KNEW I WAS GAY, THEY'D BE SO ASHAMED THAT THEY WOULD MOVE TO ANOTHER PLACE AND ACT LIKE I WASN'T THEIR SON. I'D LOVE TO TELL THEM I WAS GAY. THEY WOULD FREAK OUT. THEN THEY WOULD SCREAM AND YELL AT ME AND I COULD TELL THEM WHAT I REALLY THINK OF THEM. ALL THE VEINS IN THEIR NECKS WOULD GET BIG AND POPPED OUT. IT ISN'T TOO CRUEL TO TELL THEM—IS IT?

SIGNED, FURIOUS FRED

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 5

EXAMPLE:

DEAR TESTING,

IT DOESN'T SOUND LIKE IT WOULD REALLY DEVASTATE YOUR PARENTS TO TELL THEM YOU ARE GAY, BUT WHAT WOULD YOU DO ABOUT THEIR HURT? WHY DO YOU WANT TO TEST THEM? WHAT WILL YOU DO IF THEY DON'T COME UP TO WHAT YOU WANT? BEFORE COMING-OUT, WHY NOT EXPLORE YOUR REASONS FOR DOING IT A LITTLE MORE?

SIGNED, ABBY

BACK, CARD 6

EXAMPLE:

DEAR FURIOUS,

THEY'D GET UPSET; YOU WOULD HAVE STARTED A BIG FIGHT, AND THEN WHAT? WHAT IS THE ADVANTAGE TO ALL THIS? IF YOU WANT TO TALK ABOUT THEIR VALUES WITHOUT ATTACKING THEM, FINE, BUT IT MIGHT BE A GOOD IDEA TO KEEP BEING GAY OUT OF IT UNTIL YOU FEEL COMFORTABLE ABOUT DISCUSSING A LESS SENSITIVE AREA.

SIGNED, ABBY

FRONT, CARD 7, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY GENEROUS

DEAR ABBY,

MY FATHER DIED SEVERAL YEARS AGO WHEN I WAS A FRESHMAN IN HIGH SCHOOL. MY MOTHER HAS NOT REMARRIED OR DATED. I NOTICE SHE SPENDS A LOT OF TIME WITH SEVERAL WOMEN FRIENDS—ONE IN PARTICULAR. THIS GIVES ME THE COURAGE TO TELL HER I AM A LESBIAN. I THINK SHE NEEDS MY SUPPORT AND I KNOW IT WOULD BE NICE FOR ME TO TALK TO HER ABOUT MY FEELINGS AND MY NEW LOVER. I CAN'T DO THAT NOW. MOST AREAS OF MY LIFE ARE GOOD AND I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF. SHOULD I TAKE THE RISK OF COMING-OUT TO MY MOTHER?

SIGNED, HOPEFUL HARRIET

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

FRONT, CARD 8, S, COMING-OUT

PASS TO THE PERSON WHO IS VERY THRIFTY

DEAR ABBY,

MY PARENTS ARE PRETTY RIGID AND HAVE ALWAYS BEEN STRICT WITH ME. I GOT SPANKINGS A LOT. EVEN THOUGH I AM SIXTEEN, THEY WOULD PUNISH ME IF I TOLD THEM I THOUGHT I WAS GAY. I HAVE NO ONE TO SHARE MY SECRET WITH. IT IS DEPRESSING TO THINK THAT THERE IS NO WAY OUT. THEY'LL FIND OUT SOME HOW. I MIGHT AS WELL GET IT OVER WITH. TAKE THE BEATINGS AND HOPE I SURVIVE. WHATEVER HAPPENS IS MY FATE ANYWAY. DON'T YOU THINK I SHOULD TELL THEM?

SIGNED, SUFFERING SAM

HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND?

BACK, CARD 7

EXAMPLE:

DEAR HOPEFUL,

WHY NOT TAKE THE RISK? YOUR MOTHER SOUNDS RECEPTIVE TO HEARING WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY, BUT DON'T STEREOTYPE HER RELATIONSHIPS. IF YOU ARE RIGHT THAT SHE NEEDS YOU AND YOU NEED HER, THE BENEFITS OF COMING-OUT MIGHT BE GREAT.

BACK, CARD 8

EXAMPLE:

DEAR SUFFERING,

DON'T DO IT! IN A FEW MORE YEARS YOU'LL BE OUT OF THERE. HIDE BEING GAY UNTIL YOU LEAVE. WHAT IS THE SENSE OF INFLECTING PAIN ON YOUR SELF? SOME PLACE IN YOUR COMMUNITY THERE IS A GROUP OR PROGRAM FOR GAY AND LESBIAN TEENAGERS. FIND IT! GET SOME SUPPORT TO HELP YOU WHILE YOU WAIT FOR GRADUATION. HERE ARE HELPFUL PHONE NUMBERS, LIBRARIES, BOOKSTORES, COMMUNITY BASED AGENCIES, HEALTH SERVICES, AND HOT LINES.