

SaferSex4Seniors

Information you need to enjoy safer sexual pleasure!

Coming Out Can Be Ageless

Though some of us in the LGBT community come out in high school or college, many more disclose and/or discover our sexual orientation later in life.

Q. How can someone live into their 50s, 60s or beyond and not know they are gay?

We often assume that there must be a “right” age for coming out. Let’s think about this: our aging baby boomers grew up in a time when homosexuality was a crime, a psychiatric disorder, and morally wrong. Remember that the LGBT civil rights movement is still rather young. Power, fear, shame and violence were used to keep people in the closet.

Q. What does “coming out” mean?

Coming out or coming out of the closet is a rite of passage for every LGBT person, and is the term that describes the process of disclosing one’s sexual orientation and/or gender identity to other people. It’s often a scary and risky experience. Many of us who have been through the process can recall feelings of hope and fear mingled with pure need.

Q. Does it really matter if you don’t come out?

For many, yes. Living in the closet is stressful and can be emotionally taxing—especially with the fear that you may be outed* by someone else and lose friends and family. Many seniors seize the opportunity to come out when a life change occurs, such as children leaving home or a spouse dying. They feel circumstances have aligned to give them permission to act on their true attractions. They have an “aha” moment, maybe in conjunction with meeting a particular person or the same gender, and it all comes into focus. **Being “outed” means someone discloses your orientation/gender identity without your permission.*

Q. Does homophobia affect LGBT seniors?

Aging LGBT folks often face a double whammy: society’s ageism as well as homophobia/biphobia/transphobia. Non-gay folks often reject LGBT seniors based on the assumption that heterosexuality is the norm, i.e., that the only morally and socially acceptable relationship is one between a man and a woman (a biological man and woman, to be exact). An example is a same sex couple hearing hurtful comments about their relationship made by the staff/participants at their local senior center.

Q. Thinking about coming out? Here are a few tips:

Educate Yourself – You are not alone. People discover their sexual identity and come out at all ages for many different reasons.

Find Community – Connecting with others and discovering the same struggles and joys creates a feeling of solidarity.

Find Support – Come out initially to people who you know will be supportive. The more positive reactions you get the better you’ll feel, and will be better able to gain confidence in coming out.

Author bio: Terri Clark, MPH, CHES is an accomplished program planner, trainer and facilitator who has been providing education and training for nearly 25 years. She is currently Prevention Coordinator at ActionAIDS in Philadelphia. She is a certified trainer with the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging. She is a member of the Sexuality and Aging Consortium at Widener University and is an adjunct instructor at Arcadia University. Throughout her career in public health, she has been an advocate for gender equality and sexual health across the life cycle. Her expertise is in sexuality, including LGBT issues. Terri can be reached at tclark@actionaids.org or 917-204-7883. Copyright ©2012 Terri Clark