

ACTIVITY: “COMING OUT” STARS

The purpose of this activity is for participants to gain a better understanding of the coming out process and recognize that this process is different for every individual. It may also help participants empathize with the challenges that often accompany the coming out process.

Materials Needed: Blue, Purple, Red, and Orange paper stars, and pen/pencils for each participant

Length of time: About 20 minutes, depending on size of group

Size of group: Any

Let each person pick either a **BLUE**, **ORANGE**, **RED**, or **PURPLE** star, and then read the following to them:

Imagine that this star represents your world, with you in the center and the things or people most important to you at each point of the star. So we'll begin by writing your name in the center of the star, making it your very own star! Then, pick a point of the star. Choose a friend who is very close to you, someone you care about very much—a best friend or a close friend, it doesn't matter. Write his or her name on this point of the star.

Next, think of a community that you belong to. It could be a religious community, your neighborhood, a fraternity or sorority, or just a group of friends. Write the name of this group that you are a part of on the next point of the star, moving clockwise.

Now, think of a specific family member, someone that you have always turned to for advice, or maybe who knows how to cheer you up when you're sad—a mother, father, aunt, or uncle... any family member who has made a significant impact upon your life. Please write their name on the next point of the star.

What job would you most like to have? It could be anything from President of the United States to dentist—whatever your career aspiration is, write it on the next point.

Last, what are some of your hopes and dreams? Maybe you want to be a millionaire; maybe you want the perfect family. Think of a few of your hopes and dreams and write them on the last point of your star.

Have everyone stand up in a circle. Explain that each person is now gay or lesbian, and each is about to begin his or her coming out process. Tell them that they **cannot talk** for the rest of this activity. The trainer then reads the following to the participants:

You decide that it will be easiest to tell your friends first, since they have always been there for you in the past, and you feel they need to know.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, your friends have no problem with it. They have suspected it for some time now and thank you for being honest with them. Luckily, your friends act no differently toward you and accept you for who you are.

- If you have an **ORANGE** or **PURPLE** star, your friends are kind of hesitant. They are a little irritated that you have waited so long to tell them, but you are confident that soon they will understand that being gay or lesbian is just a part of who you are...you just need to give them some time. Please fold back this side of your star.
- If you have a **RED** star, you are met with anger and disgust. Your friends, who have been by your side in the past, tell you that being gay or lesbian is wrong and they can't associate with you anymore. If you have a red star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground; these friends are no longer a part of your lives.

With most of you having such good luck with your friends, you decide that your family probably deserves to know. You turn to your closest family member first, so that it will be a little easier.

- If you have a **PURPLE** star, the conversation does not go exactly how you planned. Several questions are asked as to how this could have happened, but after some lengthy discussion, this person who is close to you seems a little more at ease with it. Fold this side of your star back, as he or she will be an ally, but only with time.
- If you have a **BLUE** star, this family member embraces you. He or she is proud that you have decided to come out and lets you know that he or she will always be there to support you.
- If you have an **ORANGE** or **RED** star, your family member rejects the thought of being related to a person who is gay or lesbian. As with some of your friends, he or she is disgusted, and some of you are thrown out of your house or even disowned. You are now part of the 40%¹ of homeless youth who identify as gay or lesbian. If you have an orange or red star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground.

Having told your friends and family, the wheels have started to turn, and soon members of your community begin to become aware of your sexual orientation.

- If you have a **PURPLE** or **BLUE** star, your sexual orientation is accepted by your community. They continue to embrace you like anyone else, and together you celebrate the growing diversity in your community.
- If you have an **ORANGE** star, you are met with a mixed response. Some accept you, and some don't know what to think. You remain a part of the community and, with time, will fit in as you once did. If you have an orange star, please fold back this side.
- 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 your times of need no longer speak to you or acknowledge you. If you have a red star, tear this side off and drop it to the ground.

You have heard that rumors have started circulating at work regarding your sexual orientation. In the past, you have made it a point to confront these rumors as soon as they begin, but now you're not sure if that will do more harm than good. But, unfortunately, 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 rumors 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 is all that matters.

¹ LAURA E. DURSO & GARY J. GATES, SERVING OUR YOUTH: FINDINGS FROM A NATIONAL SURVEY OF SERVICES PROVIDERS WORKING WITH LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH WHO ARE HOMELESS OR AT RISK OF BECOMING HOMELESS (2012), <http://williamsinstitute.law.ucla.edu/wp-content/uploads/Durso-Gates-LGBT-Homeless-Youth-Survey-July-2012.pdf>.

- If you have a **PURPLE** star, your workplace has become quite interesting. Everyone seems to think that you are gay or lesbian, even though you haven't mentioned it to anyone or confirmed any of the rumors. Some people speak to you less often, but the environment has not seemed to change too drastically. If you have a purple star, please fold back this side.
- If you have a **RED** or **ORANGE** star, you continue to work as though nothing is happening, ignoring the rumors that have spread throughout your workplace. One day, you come in to find that your office has been packed up. You are called into your boss's office, and she explains that you are being fired. When you ask why, she tells you that lately your work has been less than satisfactory and that she had to make some cutbacks in your area. If you have a red or orange star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground.

Now...your future lies ahead of you as a gay man or lesbian. Your hopes and dreams, and your wishes for the perfect life...for some of you, these are all that remain.

- If you have a **PURPLE**, **BLUE**, or **ORANGE** star, these hopes and dreams are what keep you going. Most of you have encountered 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 to the ground. You are now part of the group of suicide victims who are gay or lesbian.

Source: Jeff Pierce, University of Southern California