



THINKING ABOUT COMING OUT

A Free Session for Girls Circle®, Unity Circle™, and The Council for Boys and Young Men® Facilitators and Youth Program Providers Everywhere | **For Ages 11-18**

*This One Circle Foundation session is available at no charge and was inspired by **The Trevor Project**, whose mission is to end suicide among LGBTQ young people. We are truly grateful for their contributions to the LGBTQ+ community.*

“The pressures on LGBTQ+ teens can be overwhelming – to keep secrets, tell lies, deny who you are, and try to be who you’re not. Remember: You are special and worth being cared about, loved, and accepted just as you are. Never, ever let anyone convince you otherwise.”

– Alex Sánchez, Award-Winning Author, Speaker, Editor, Writing Mentor

For some LGBTQ+ youth, reservations, fears, and questions may prevent them from exploring their identity. This session aims to support them in this journey by providing a safe and supportive Circle experience. It provides activities and peer support to determine whether coming out is something they may want to consider. In sharing and listening to one another during facilitated discussions and activities, youth can be validated for who they are and for the stress they may feel every day while recognizing that there is nothing wrong with them. Their peers are also dealing with some of these difficulties. This session will celebrate and honor individuals as they navigate their path to self-discovery, identifying the common challenges and strengths they encounter in their identities. Together, they will learn coping skills, which may include jointly creating safety tips and accessing further resources for support, as they contemplate the idea of coming out.

Recommended time: 90-120 minutes. *If needed, this session may be separated into two by moving Activity 3 to a follow-up session.*

ACTIVITY

- Discussion: Exploring Our Identities; Exploring Coming Out
- Creative: Outside & Inside Me
- Co-Create: Tips for Safety & Support

MATERIALS

- **SOGIE Handbook** (https://onecirclefoundation.org/media/pdfs/SOGIE_Handbook.pdf)
- Pens, pencils
- Markers
- Flip chart or mural paper
- Squishy ball or soft item for tossing

- Paper Bags (lunch size or any size okay), one per person
- Blank sheets of paper cut up into about 6 slips per participant
- Music player with instrumental music ready to play
- Resources Handout, at the end of this session

PURPOSE

- Define the terms sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, and sex assigned at birth.
- Identify concerns, needs, and strengths of young people in considering coming out.
- Gain knowledge and coping skills to manage stress and support one another around considering coming out.
- Co-create a set of safety and support tips, including knowledge of local and national resources for LGBTQ+ youth and families.

FACILITATOR PREPARATION

- 1 Read through the entire session to become familiar with the activities.
- 2 Prepare instrumental music selection for use during Activity 3.
- 3 Gather and prepare materials and the room.
- 4 Prepare a list with a variety of intersectional identities on a piece of flip chart paper:
Cultural Background, Diverse Abilities, Educational Background, Financial Reality, Languages Spoken, Life Experience, Place of Birth, Race, Spiritual/Religious Beliefs, Gender Identity, Well-being (physical & mental wellness), other (add your own) _____
- 5 Cut up strips of paper, about 6 strips per participant
- 6 On a sheet of flipchart or mural paper, draw a line across the middle, vertical or horizontal. Title one half: SAFETY. Title the other side: SUPPORT.
- 7 Review the National and International Resources Handout and write down local or regional resources for LGBTQ+ youth, families, or allies. Make copies, one per person.

Note to Facilitator: Throughout this activity guide, there may be activities that recommend movement. For persons with varying abilities, please provide alternative instructions to meet the abilities of all participants.

OPENING RITUAL

Open with your chosen ritual that marks the beginning of your Circle.

(Examples: Ringing a bell, having each participant say one word about how they are feeling, a few moments of silence, a song, sharing a special reading, a special handshake, etc.)

THEME INTRO

“All young people, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, deserve a safe and supportive environment in which to achieve their full potential.” – Harvey Milk

- 1 Introduce the theme of the week, “Thinking About Coming Out.”
- 2 Say,
 - Exploring sexual orientation and/or gender identity can be confusing and may bring up a lot of feelings and questions. When thinking about if, whether, or how to come out and how to support friends who do, it can help to consider and express more about who we are and how to manage challenges around coming out. Today’s discussion and activities may provide more self-understanding and support while considering coming out, and guidance as allies for peers thinking through this question.



CAUTION NOTICE: Say, “If this topic is uncomfortable at any time, please take care of yourself and one another: take a break, ask to share, get some air, or let us know what we can do to support you today.”

WARM-UP

Choose a warm-up from the list at the end of this session.

CHECK-IN

- 1 Place the talking piece or focus tool in the middle of the circle, and invite one participant to volunteer to start.
- 2 Invite them to share one high and one low of the day or week or anything else they want to share about what’s on their minds, in their hearts, or going on in general.
- 3 Remind the group that it’s okay for participants to pass.
- 4 Say, “Whatever is spoken in Circle is considered with respect.”

ACTIVITY 1

Discussion: Exploring Our Identities; Exploring Coming Out

*Materials: **SOGIE Handbook**, pgs. 6-13; squishy ball or soft item for tossing*

- 1 Introduction: Say,
 - When young people see that self-exploration is an option, many more questions may come up. It can take time to figure out who we are, and that can change as we explore; that’s okay! It’s important to understand that there is no specific time we are supposed to figure out who we are. It’s different for everyone. Some people can know who they are at a very young age; for others, it can be a journey, but it’s okay not to rush it.

- As individuals, many things contribute to our identities, such as our ethnicity, religion, class, race, and gender. Additionally, gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation are also important parts of who we are. It's perfectly normal not to have a clear understanding of all these terms, and it's okay not to have all the answers. We will explore what these words mean together as a group.
- Many people aren't sure of the differences between gender identity, gender expression, sex assigned at birth, and sexual orientation. It isn't something many of us are taught. Instead, lots of us end up figuring out what these words mean on our own. Let's spend some time breaking down the differences between each of these terms and exploring what they mean together.
- There are a lot of terms that express who we are. Let's look at some of them and define how we see these terms. Can I have a volunteer go up to the flip chart to write down how the group defines some of these terms?
- Let's look at **gender identity**. What does that term mean?
(After participants have shared, read through and discuss the meaning of the word. See SOGIE Handbook, pages 6-13.)
- Let's look at **gender expression**. What does that term mean?
(After participants have shared, read through and discuss the meaning of the word. See SOGIE Handbook, page 7.)
- Let's look at the term "**sex assigned at birth**." What does that mean?
(After participants have shared, read through and discuss the meaning of the word. See SOGIE Handbook, page 8.)
- Let's look at **sexual orientation**. What does that term mean?
(After participants have shared, read through and discuss the meaning of the word. See SOGIE Handbook, page 8.)
- What questions do you have about these terms?

2 Say,

- Let's stand in a circle. I'm going to ask a few questions now. If you have a response, say so, and I'll toss the ball (or object) to you to express your thoughts. Then, you'll toss the ball to someone who wants to respond to the same question, and that person can toss it to someone else.
- Make sure when tossing the ball that the person is looking at you and ready to catch it.
- I'll continue to ask questions as we go.
- **1st Question: What are some reasons that people might want to come out?** *Toss the ball to the first person who wants to respond. Hear from a few participants as they take turns answering and tossing the ball to others. Then, ask for the ball to come back to you.*

- **2nd Question: What worries and other feelings do people have about coming out?** *Toss the ball to the first person who wants to respond. Hear from a few participants as they take turns and toss the ball to others. Ask for the ball to come back to you.*
- **3rd Question: What are some ways to manage stress when worrying about coming out, and can you describe how to use them?**

Note to Facilitator: Responses that youth might give to this question could include: talking to a friend or caring adult, journaling, hugging a pet, drawing, listening to music or a relaxation story, playing games, getting outside, writing a pros and cons list, encouraging yourself, etc.

IF no one mentions a breathing strategy, you may suggest 2x4 breathing (inhale gently for 2, hold, exhale slowly for 4, hold; repeat), as an effective method for self-soothing.

Toss the ball to the first person who wants to respond. Hear from several participants as they take turns and toss the ball to others. Ask for the ball to come back to you.

- **4th Question: What are some of the strengths that people can bring to decision-making about if, whether, and/or how to come out?** *Toss the ball to the first person who wants to respond. Hear from several participants as they take turns and toss the ball to others. Ask for the ball to come back to you.*
- 3 Summarize some key statements participants shared (*reasons some may want to come out, worries, ways to manage the stress, and strengths to tap into during this decision-making process*).
 - 4 Say,
 - Exploring many aspects of our identities can sometimes offer more clarity around the idea of coming out. In our next activity, we'll express more of who we are on the outside and the inside.

ACTIVITY 2

Outside & Inside Me

Materials: Prepared flip chart sheet, paper bags, paper slips, pens, pencils, and markers

- 1 Ask three volunteers to read aloud the following three bullets, one bullet per volunteer. Have them read directly from this guide.

Volunteer 1 reads:

- Each of us is a unique individual. We each have the right to choose to share all, some, or nothing at all about who we are.

Volunteer 2 reads:

- Exploring who you are is a journey. You may not be at a place where you are ready to come out. There is no rush. Deciding to share who you are with others can be scary. You may be worried that if you share who you are, you may lose friends or family. These are very real concerns. If you are ready, coming out to supportive individuals in your life can help you feel accepted for who you are.

Volunteer 3 reads:

- Many things make up who we are. We talked earlier about our ethnicity, religion, class, race, and gender. These are just a few aspects that make us who we are. Our gender expression, gender identity, as well as our sexual orientation all play crucial roles in defining us as whole individuals.
- 2 Show the prepared piece of flip chart paper with the list of different ways we may identify.
 - 3 Pass out the bags, slips of paper, pens, pencils, and markers. Invite Circle participants to take 5 minutes on their own and, using the flip chart list, think about the many different parts of themselves. Ask them to decorate the *outside of their bags* with words, drawings, shapes, or symbols of aspects of their identities that are sources of happiness, comfort, pride, interest, acceptance, or strength. Allow a few minutes.
 - 4 Now, ask the participants to use the paper strips and write words or draw symbols of aspects of their identities on one side of each strip of paper and on the other side of the strip, to draw or write a concern, need, or barrier they face around that aspect of their identity. Examples:
 - a) Someone writes “Spanish – first language” on one side, and on the other, “People think I’m not from here”
 - b) Someone writes, “Nonbinary” on one side of the strip of paper, and “called a freak” on the other side
 - c) Someone draws a “†” on one side; on the other, an “X” through a 🏠.
- Ask them to then place each strip of paper on the *inside* of their bag. Allow up to 10 minutes to complete this step.
- 5 Play instrumental music. After about 7-8 minutes, say, “Two minutes to complete your strips.”
 - 6 Next, invite each willing person to share a couple of the aspects on the outside of the bag that make them happy or proud and one or two aspects of themselves on the strips of paper from inside their bags that present a challenge for them.

SHARING OF ACTIVITY

Thank the group for sharing. Ask,

- What happened here as we heard from one another about feelings around who they are?
- How was it to learn more about one another?
- How was sharing more of yourselves with one another?
- What were some common themes?
- What surprised you?
- What can we take from our experience with this activity, especially around supporting people who might be struggling with the idea of coming out?

ACTIVITY 3

Co-Create Tips for Safety & Support

Materials: Prepared sheet of flipchart or mural paper; one sheet of regular paper, markers, crayons, pencils

- 1 Set the sheet of flipchart or mural paper on the floor in the center of the Circle with markers, crayons, and pencils.
- 2 Say:
 - People decide to come out or not for different reasons. It's a personal decision. For some, they may be afraid that if they come out to a few people, others may find out, they won't be accepted, and they'll be judged or bullied. For others, not coming out when a friend has decided to can be stressful, too. These are all real concerns.
 - Some of us may have seen on social media, news shows, or real experiences of our peers, situations where coming out was not supported. Sometimes, it's worth the risks, sometimes it is not, or the decision can be considered later on.
 - For those of us in this Circle, whatever the decisions, you will be supported. We will celebrate and support one another in our Circle for who each person is on your journey.
 - Yet, for kids who don't have a Circle, and even for ourselves, there are some tried and true safety tips and ideas you may have for people thinking about coming out, and tips for allies on how to support them.
- 3 Say,
 - For this activity, please work together to create a sheet of your best tips.
 - Here's how:
 - a) Name together the kinds of safer or riskier situations for people thinking of coming out (such as with a peer, friend, family member, school, counselor, minister, coach, etc.).
 - b) Then suggest tips that come to mind.
 - c) When everyone agrees with a *safety tip*, write and/or draw it on the SAFETY half of the sheet.
 - d) When everyone agrees with a *tip to support* a person coming out, write it on the SUPPORT half.
 - e) We may not all agree on each tip and that's okay. For this exercise, we'll just add the items where we can all agree, ensuring that we're only including the tips that feel safest for everyone.
 - f) Whether you identify as LGBTQ+ or an ally, or something else, each of you has wisdom and experience to offer. Once the tips are created, we can decide if we want to take a picture and post or share, or I can save it for future reference whenever someone wants to see it.

- 4 Give the participants 15-20 minutes to come up with their tips and put them down on the paper. Play the instrumental music at a background level. Join the activity but aim to guide the group as they think through situations and develop their tips together.
- 5 If they need some assistance to think of situations where young people might need *safety tips*, offer any one or more of the following possible risky scenarios and what tips young people would need in these:
 - At home, unsure if a family member would listen or shut the topic down.
 - In group chats, where people sometimes gossip about peers.
 - Socially transitioning at school with pronouns and gender expression but some adults there won't use their new name or pronouns or let them use their preferred bathroom.
 - They have a crush on someone of the same sex but haven't come out.
 - At church, the youth group leader seems open and accepting but the minister and congregation are not.
 - Bullying happens at school and on social media and someone starts thinking of ending their life.
 - Being online in a safe site for LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit youth when someone walks in the room.
 - Being anywhere that someone might be targeted and physically harmed.
- 6 After about 10-15 mins, give a 5-minute notice to complete the sheet. Ask them to check that there are *tips* on both sides of the sheet. Invite them to decorate the sheet once they have written down several SAFETY and SUPPORT tips.
- 7 Tell the group that time is up, thank them, and ask everyone to come back into the circle.

SHARING OF ACTIVITY

Materials: Copies of Resources Handout

- 1 Thank everyone for their creative work. Ask,
 - How was that?
 - What did you notice about creating the tips together?
 - How many would want me to take a picture and share it with you, so you'd have it whenever it might be useful for anyone you know? Is there anything else that should happen with this sheet?
 - What are some of the best resources you know of to support LGBTQ+ youth?
- 2 Pass out the Resources Handout. Invite people to look it over, keep the handout somewhere useful, or take a picture of it with their phones.

3 Application Question:

- Pass the talking piece around the circle one more time. Ask,
What is one thing you can do this week to celebrate who you are while keeping safe and supported?

[For allies, what is one thing you can do this week to celebrate who you are while keeping safe and supporting your LGBTQ+ peers?]

- 4 If anyone wants a picture of the SAFETY/SUPPORT sheet, take the photo now and share it before the closing ritual.



SAFETY CHECK-IN

- Ask for a “safety check-in” – on a scale of 1-5, with 1 meaning they feel **unsafe**, and 5 meaning they feel **very safe**, what number are they at?
- For each person who indicates a 1 or 2, ask what they might want or need from the circle participants, **and**, ask them to stay after the closing of the circle so you can speak one-on-one with them.
- If anyone indicates a 3, ask them what is one thing that they need that would move their scale number to a 4.

CLOSING RITUAL

Thank everyone for their participation and let them know that you look forward to seeing them at the next Circle. Complete the session with your chosen closing ritual.



SAFETY FOLLOW-UP: Check in individually with each person you are concerned for and any who indicated feeling unsafe. Identify concerns if possible. For those in an unsafe situation, follow your organization’s crisis protocol. If you are unsure of what to do or whom to contact, contact your supervisor or director, a local resource, or a national resource provided on the **Resources** pages at the end of this session.

Connect them with a safe adult, a plan if/as needed, and/or an appropriate resource to further assess their needs or the needs of someone they’re concerned about.

Be sure to have the circle participant’s contact information to follow up.

If they are concerned for their own safety, stay with them until they are connected to an identified safe adult or local authority.

RESOURCES HANDOUT

Local:

Facilitators, please write down some local or regional resources that an LGBTQ+ youth and their allies can contact:

National:

FAMILY ACCEPTANCE PROJECT – They help prevent physical and mental health risks for LGBTQ children and youth. www.familyproject.sfsu.edu

CRISIS TEXT LINE – Provides free, 24/7 support via text message. Text **HOME** to **741741**. www.crisistextline.org

GAY, LESBIAN, AND STRAIGHT EDUCATION NETWORK – Goal is to ensure schools that are safe for all, irrespective of their gender identity, gender expression or sexual orientation. www.glsen.org

GLBT NEAR ME – Database of LGBTQ resources, offers a national hotline and a youth talkline. www.glbtnearme.org

HELPPRO – National search for social workers, mental health counselors, and psychologists, with the ability to search for providers who serve specifically LGBTQ populations. www.helppro.com

LAMBDA LEGAL – American civil rights organization focusing on equality for LGBTQ+ people. www.lambdalegal.org

NATIONAL SUICIDE PREVENTION LIFELINE – 24/7 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline. **988 Dial, Text, or Chat**. <https://988lifeline.org>

PFLAG – The first and largest organization dedicated to supporting, educating, and advocating for LGBTQ+ people and their families. <https://pflag.org>

THE TREVOR PROJECT – 24/7 crisis support services to LGBTQ+ young people. **Text 'START' to 678-678; Call 1-866-488-7386; or Chat www.thetrevorproject.org/get-help** | Also, creators of *It Gets Better Project*: creating media sharing stories around the resilience of LGBTQ+ people across the globe: itgetsbetter.org

INTERNATIONAL

IT GETS BETTER CANADA – Uplifts, empowers and connects LGBTQ+ and Two-Spirit youth across Canada: <https://itgetsbettercanada.org/get-help>

THE INSTITUTE FOR WELCOMING RESOURCES – International organization working to make churches become welcoming and affirming spaces for all congregants regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity: <https://welcomingresources.org>

SUICIDE PREVENTION HOTLINES – International listings: <http://suicide.org/international-suicide-hotlines.html>

TREVORSPACE – Safe and secure social networking site for LGBTQ+ everywhere: www.thetrevorproject.org/resources/article/resources-for-international-lgbtq-youth

WARM-UP ACTIVITIES

Ten Things in Common

In Person or Online

Let participants know that the Ten Things in Common warm-up activity will have participants work together in pairs at first, and then as a whole group. Pairs will come up with a list of 10 things that they have in common, (e.g., gender, ethnicity, we are both wearing shoes, we own a MacBook, we are both sitting on a chair, we each have a cellphone, etc.) Tell them they will have 5 minutes to come up with the 10 commonalities.

- 1 Break participants into pairs in the room or break-out rooms online. Pair participants up with someone they do not know well.
 - 2 Set the time for 5 minutes.
 - 3 Bring everyone back to the whole circle.
 - 4 Ask someone from each pair to share quickly their list of 10 commonalities. Ask the other circle members to raise a thumbs-up In Person or use a Thumbs-up reaction Online if they, too, have the thing in common that another pair has shared, whether it's on their list or something individually true for them (but not on list.)
 - 5 Ask, "What did this activity reveal about how we see commonalities with others?"
-

You Are famous

In Person

In the You Are Famous warm-up activity, participants ask questions in order to identify the hidden profession assigned to others. It requires participants to walk around the room asking each other questions that can only be answered with a "Yes" or "No."

- 1 Have the prepared individual pieces of paper with the following professions:

| | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|------------------|-------------|
| <i>Football Star</i> | <i>Doctor</i> | <i>Ballerina</i> | <i>Chef</i> |
| <i>Astronaut</i> | <i>Famous Rapper</i> | <i>Scientist</i> | |
| <i>Rock Star</i> | <i>Banker</i> | <i>Teacher</i> | |
- 2 Tell participants that you will begin to play some soft music in a moment. They will each be handed a folded piece of paper with a profession written on the paper. Let the participant know that they need to keep the profession to themselves.
- 3 Say,
 - When the music starts we will all walk around the room asking each other questions in order to identify each other's secret profession.
 - You can only ask questions that can be answered with a "Yes" or "No."

- You will have ten minutes to move around the room and ask each other questions.
 - When the music stops everyone will go back and sit in the circle.
 - It is okay to physically demonstrate a bit, if you wish, but there is no talking about what your profession is other than by answering “Yes” or “No.”
 - I will play the music. Can everyone hear it clearly? Okay, when you hear the music stop, we’ll come back to circle.
 - Ready, begin!
- 4 Give people about ten minutes to interact.
 - 5 As participants are walking around, list each one’s name on the flip chart or Whiteboard.
 - 6 Turn the music off and ask everyone to return to the circle.
 - 7 Say,
 - Using the talking piece/focus tool we will go around the circle. One at a time, each person will have an opportunity to share what profession they think had been assigned to each of the other people.
 - As each person states the profession they believe that each of the others is representing, write these next to the name of the person in question.
 - Celebrate with a round of applause and thank them for participating in the warm-up activity.

Scavenger Hunt

In Person or Online

- 1 Write or type items:

| | | | | |
|-------------|-------------------|----------------|------------------------|-------------------|
| <i>Pen</i> | <i>Cell phone</i> | <i>Sock</i> | <i>Cup</i> | <i>Red crayon</i> |
| <i>Book</i> | <i>Ring</i> | <i>Quarter</i> | <i>Pair of glasses</i> | |

- 2 Say:

- We are going to start with a warm-up activity. Who has participated in a scavenger hunt?

- 3 Say,

- The warm-up will involve working individually to collect a list of items. I’m going to write a list of items for you to find either in this room or in your home.
- When I say go you will go around and find the items listed.
- Whoever collects all the items first wins.
- Is everyone ready?
- You will have 10 minutes to find the items and return to the circle, so watch your time.

- 4 Bring everyone back to the circle and celebrate who collected all the items first.