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ABOUT THIS RESOURCE

This resource is produced by Stonewall, a UK-based charity that stands for the freedom, equity and potential of all lesbian, gay, bi, trans, queer, questioning and ace (LGBTQ+) people.

At Stonewall, we imagine a world where LGBTQ+ people everywhere can live our lives to the full.

Founded in London in 1989, we now work in each nation of the UK and have established partnerships across the globe. Over the last three decades, we have created transformative change in the lives of LGBTQ+ people in the UK, helping win equal rights around marriage, having children and inclusive education.

Our campaigns drive positive change for our communities, and our sustained change and empowerment programmes ensure that LGBTQ+ people can thrive throughout our lives. We make sure that the world hears and learns from our communities, and our work is grounded in evidence and expertise.

To find out more about our work, visit us at www.stonewall.org.uk

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STONEWALL YOUNG FUTURES

Insights from our Focus Group on 'coming out'

June 2022

Project background

[Stonewall Young Futures](#) has been developed in response to our [Shut Out report](#). Co-production with LGBTQ+ young people is central to the project.

So far, over 60 LGBTQ+ young people have contributed directly to the project, through focus groups and user testing. We're committed to offering payment or gift vouchers to all young people in return for their participation.

We are sharing these reports so that any setting or service for LGBTQ+ young people can use the insights to understand lived experiences and work to ensure they are LGBTQ-inclusive.

"Misgendering has such a big impact on my life, especially in the workplace. In the workplace, I'm either out as trans or I'm not - and that depends on whether the job is inside my university or if it's not - because I feel much safer within the university."- youth focus group participant

In June 2022, Stonewall ran a youth focus group for LGBTQ+ young people aged 16-24. The group ran for two hours and took place online, with 9 young people taking part. The session was facilitated by Stonewall staff with support from an external Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) consultant and a Wellbeing Consultant.
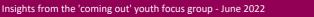
The session aimed to gather information about different experiences of coming out as LGBTQ+ in different settings, and to get feedback on what information and resources Stonewall Young Futures can provide young people to support them with this.

Experiences of coming out

Focus group participants had many different experiences, both positive and negative, across different settings.

Family and friends:

- For some young people, there was a fear of rejection when thinking about coming out to family and friends. There was also a pressure to fit in with groups of friends, which led to a reluctance to come out as LGBTQ+

- Lots of the participants were out as LGBTQ+ in some areas and settings of their life, but not in others

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- When growing up, some young people heard lots of homophobic, biphobic and transphobic comments from their parents, which resulted in fear about coming out

"With family, it was always really difficult. I expected my mum to reject me, but she said she already knew. For the most part I've received positive responses" - youth focus group participant

- One young person was exposed to conversion therapy by their parent when they came out as bi and trans. They faced abuse and their parent threatened to ruin their relationships with friends and family

Education settings:

- A few participants used the transition between school and college or university to come out as LGBTQ+

- One young person was forced to come out as gay in a religious school setting and didn't feel safe being out at all

"I didn't come out at school or college, but I came out at uni when I had a big group of friends" - youth focus group participant

- One young person had a very positive experience of coming out as trans at school and the teachers were very supportive. However, other participants had challenging experiences of coming out as trans at school

"All the teachers there were amazing... [the school] had so much experience which made it so much better" - youth focus group participant

- Participants felt that schools need access to information and guidance on how to support trans students in particular

- Some participants found supportive LGBTQ+ communities at university where there find it easy to be themselves

- One participant joined LGBTQ+ accommodation at university, which they found really beneficial

"My school had no idea how to do a name change. A lot of schools need more guidance on how to deal with that. Also, guidance on accessibility of spaces such as changing rooms." - youth focus group participant

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Training, apprenticeships, workplaces:

- Some participants felt especially worried about coming out as non-binary in the workplace for a fear of a lack of understanding

- For some, coming out at work results in an unfair expectation to educate colleagues on identities and experiences

"When I came out at work as trans, while (most) people didn't have a negative reaction, it was mainly confusion and it felt like I had to educate a lot of people, I basically became a walking talking trans dictionary. A lot of questions were pretty invasive and personal." - youth focus group participant

- One participant's sexuality was assumed in the workplace by colleagues due to their reactions to other people's homophobia

- For one participant, coming out as trans in the workplace depends on the location and setting of the workplace and if they feel safe

"I can't remember ever actually coming out in a workplace - I was one of the youngest employees and people would say things that were a little bit homophobic. I called it out and I think they worked out that I am probably gay." - youth focus group participant

Different LGBTQ+ identities:

- Participants agreed that finding information when you know you're LGBTQ+, but you're confused about your identity, can be a difficult process

- One participant had recently come out as asexual, and it was initially a shock when they found out about asexuality because they had never heard about it before

- Trans and non-binary participants agreed that it was much harder to come out about their gender in comparison to sexuality, because of increased stigma

"Coming out as non-binary was more difficult [than sexuality], there was less understanding" - youth focus group participant

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The term, 'coming out':

- Participants had different thoughts on the term, 'coming out'

- One participant expressed how they would like to not have to 'come out', but just "be who I am"

- For some, the term 'coming out' feels conditional on a person's response, which creates an uneven power dynamic. One participant suggested it might be more helpful to think about language like 'accepting yourself' and sharing who you are with other people if you want to and/or if you are able to

- Participants recognised that 'coming out' is a complex topic and it's not a term that everyone feels comfortable with. It can feel like it focuses attention on other people's reactions to you

What resources are needed to support LGBTQ+ young people with 'coming out'?

- It would be useful to have a few indicators that coming out could be unsafe, and we should be able to prepare young people for all outcomes after coming out

- It's important to provide resources on what to do if coming out doesn't go well. A resource should advise people that if they aren't safe, it may not be best to come out, and it should include advice on what to do if your safety is at risk

- It's useful to reassure people that you can tell one person you trust first, rather than having to come out to everyone all at once. Advice on coming out to yourself could also be useful

- It would be helpful to have a glossary which has a description of what all the words, acronyms and different identities mean. It's important that a resource like this represents all identities

- Clear links to other organisations and places for support is useful, including mental health support

- It would be helpful to hear stories from people who look like you or who are like you

- A new resource should include information on the fact that coming out as one thing and then that changing is totally fine – it doesn't invalidate things at all

- It's important to provide information on intersectional and overlapping identities. It's also important to note that you can have different LGBTQ+ identities and that coming out for all of them can be different

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- Video resources and webpages are helpful and accessible and can help young people see themselves reflected

- Videos of people should be diverse to help show that being LGBTQ+ doesn't have to fit a certain look and is a diverse experience

- Having a printed / physical guide could pose a risk for young people in case someone sees it

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