



# Living Life Openly

**Mingle's Coming Out guide for gay and lesbian Indians**

**Mingle's Coming Out Project**



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Being brave is not about never being scared. It is about doing the things you are scared of anyway.

The prospect of living life openly as a gay, lesbian or bisexual person may be scary at first, but eventually we realize that living a life that is consistent with our true selves

is always worth it. Think about it.

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“Coming Out is not a one step act, it is a process.

A process where we evolve into our true selves, also becoming stronger, wiser and more aware of the world around us.”

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### 3. Message from Mingle



Out is IN!

Harrish Iyer

Advisory Board

Member,

Family Issues

#### **How important is it to come out?**

Well, it is not as much important to come out to the world as much as it is to come out to oneself. You know when your hormones make you think the way your friend doesn't think, you feel puzzled and then you muzzle yourself in the closets of shame and silence. Come out when you feel you wish to. Not because you HAVE to. There are no rules, no compulsions.

**Coming out is an experience.** And no two experiences are same or even similar. They may SEEM similar... but you know and I know, that TO EACH ITS OWN. Here is something that I had written recollecting the time I came out.

I have been so long,  
not knowing whether weak and strong  
- blind with my wavering mind.

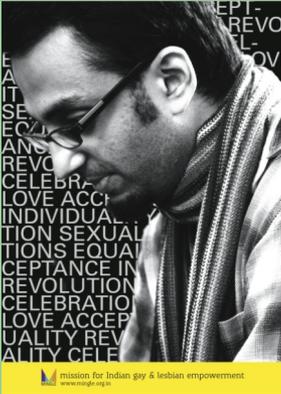
Now for sure,

out of the obscure,

Those bygones so far gone

- I find.

## 4. Welcome



We are born into a country—and a world—where we face discrimination on the basis of who we choose to love. Born in enemy territory, we are faced with a society that does not understand or accept us, and a legal system that reflects this lack of acceptance.

And so, naturally, coming out of the closet is an extremely difficult, but also an extremely important, decision in the life of an LGBT person, especially in India.

By coming out, not only are you being true to yourself and to those whom you love, you are also being part of the change that needs to take place in the minds and hearts of people. By coming out you are aiding the entire community in its quest to be visible and recognition and acceptance can only come about through visibility. More than that, you become an inspiration for the numerous who're still struggling in their closets.

## 5. Welcome



While a lot of people see coming out as a risk worth taking, coming out is also an extremely personal decision and there is no fact of the matter about whether or not one should come out. You shouldn't feel any pressure to come out if you aren't ready. But nor should you feel that you can't come out when you are.

You should know that you are not alone and that you can always find support if you look for it.

Hopefully this guide will help you think about the question of coming out and provide you with the tools you need if you do decide to come out.

## 6. Being open with yourself

Throughout the Coming Out process it is normal to feel:

- Scared
- Vulnerable
- Proud
- Brave
- Exhilarated
- Confused
- Empowered
- Relieved
- Uncertain
- Affirmed

The first stage in coming out is coming out to yourself. ‘Lesbian’, ‘Gay’, and ‘Bisexuals’ aren’t categories that are available to a lot of Indians growing up. From birth, we’re expected to fit into certain moulds. Boys and girls are “supposed” to act and feel differently, and also get attracted to the other sex.

We are led to believe, if something is not common is wrong and unnatural. This sense of shame often affects even those who have intellectually accepted that there is nothing wrong with being lesbian, gay or bisexual.

The first stage of coming out is recognizing the existence of same-sex desire.

The second stage involves accepting that desire.

Before you can seek acceptance from others, you need to seek acceptance from yourself. And this is one of the hardest parts of coming out for a lot of people. Just to open up to the possibility that you may be gay or lesbian is therefore a step in the right direction.

## 7. Being open with yourself

And remember:

Your sexuality is not what you have become. It is what you are.

So don't look for a reason and feel bad that you are 'different'. Just know that you are just as different as everybody else around – all sexualities included.

If you're reading this, chances are you already know the following but it bears repeating: You are different but you are not perverted. Your desires are not common. That does not mean that they are not acceptable. You will not find a lot of people like you. That does not mean that there is anything wrong with you. And there are enough people like you. Enough people who form a vibrant and welcoming community that you can be part of. You are not alone.

## 8. Deciding to Tell Others

### The benefits of Coming Out:

- A more honest and open life
- Closer relationships with your family and friends
- Reducing the stress of trying to be hide your identity
- Connecting with other LGBT people
- Being part of a vibrant and loving community of similar people
- Helping bring about a positive change in your surroundings by dispelling myths about gay and lesbian people
- Being a role model to younger and closeted gay men and women

The most important reason why most of us come out is because we can not stand our closeted lives any longer. We yearn for a more honest, open and enriching relationship with our families and friends.

But there is no one answer, again, to whether or not you should come out of the closet completely. You have to weigh all the risks involved and compare them to the benefits in each situation.

For example, it may not be wise to come out to your parents if they're funding your studies and you're in the middle of them or if you are financially dependent on them. In such cases it is best to wait a while (in the former case) and/or make sure you are emotionally and financially secure before you tell them.

The first people you come out to should be those whom you feel will take it well. Think about the most broad-minded person you know. Maybe you know someone who is queer? Try coming out to that person first. You need all the support you can get and it is never a good idea to come out to people whose reaction

## 9. Deciding to Tell Others

### The risks of Coming Out:

- You may not get acceptance from everyone
- You may face hostility, exclusion or even violence
- Younger people may face restrictions on their freedom from their families, or may even be thrown out of their homes
- You may face discrimination in your public life

you aren't sure of before you come out to people whose positive reaction you can count on.

Of course this will vary from case to case, but it's often a good idea to first come out to your friends. Know that this is not going to be easy and you do risk losing some friends but always stay focused on what you will be gaining. You may also gain new friends and deepen and strengthen existing friendships.

The next step is coming out to your family. This is, for most people, the scariest step because this is where you stand to lose the most. While most parents, even those who may not seem LGBT-friendly, accept and in time embrace their LGBT child there are always cases where coming out to your parents may elicit extreme reactions. This is why it is extremely important, especially for women, to be prepared for the worst eventuality. The next section of this guide elaborates on this, and tells you more about making a coming out plan.

## 10. Deciding to Tell Others

Who matters most? You!

“Haan Haan! Life outside is beautiful. But let’s check the weather first!”

These benefits and risks clearly indicate that Coming Out is your personal calling. It can not be forced on you. Plus, there is no one right way to come out. Do it when it is necessary, in a way that is least damaging to you and the people around you.



“I was surprised when my friends accepted me for who I am and did not judge me. I did lose out on some friends who couldn't believe it and felt cheated that I lied to them over the years portraying a Casanova image. But nonetheless, I was lucky enough to have some friends who stuck by me for just the way I was. This gave me the strength to come out to my family and to my surprise they were remarkably supportive, my mother did throw a fit and said that it was a passing phase of my life but she did come around over the years.”

- Indroneel Mukherjee

## 11. Making a Coming Out Plan

If you're at this stage of coming out, you've already come out to yourself. Now, it is important for you to make a plan before you come out to people whose reaction you are not sure of, especially when it is your parents and other family.

### **Anticipating the response**

It's very important to test the waters. When you decide that you want to come out to someone, it might be a good idea to try and discuss queer issues with them beforehand in order to gauge their response.

You could try watching an LGBT-themed movie with them and discuss it afterwards.

You could bring up a news item relating to LGBT rights and see how they respond.

Spending some time educating people before you come out to them also might make coming out a lot easier for you and for them. And it will, of course, give you an idea of their response to your coming out so you can plan accordingly.

### **Awareness about LGBT issues**

Mentally prepare yourself to answer the most outrageous questions. See the Resources section as well as the Myths about LGBT People section for more help in this area.

Keep track of LGBT news. One great way to do this is to use Google News.

## 12. Deciding to Tell Others

You don't have to do this alone. Some of you will be lucky enough to have friends who are LGBT or vocal Allies.

You need to first educate yourself before you can hope to educate others.

And once you have educated yourself, you have to be prepared to be very patient and you have to try and be as resilient as you can.

### **Knowing what to say**

In this regard, labels do not matter. Your feelings matter. Probably you can start off by telling how you have feelings for the same sex, or how you feel uncomfortable with traditional gender norms. Consider writing out your thoughts beforehand just to organize them. You may not need a movie-like coming out speech. Pouring out your heart is what helps most.

### **Ensuring a support structure**

You don't have to do this alone. Some of you will be lucky enough to have friends who are LGBT or vocal Allies. Make sure that they know what's going on and make sure that they will be there for you. Also, there are a lot of organizations that can help you. There's a good chance you'll find friends at their support meetings.

## 13. Making a Coming Out Plan

If you're at this stage of coming out, you've already come out to yourself. Now, it is important for you to make a plan before you come out to people whose reaction you are not sure of, especially when it is your parents and other family.

### Conditions in which it's better to postpone coming out

As mentioned earlier, there are no hard and fast rules about when you should come out. There are, however, some situations in which it would not be wise to come out. Before you think of coming out to others, be sure to ask yourself these questions:

- Do I have an adequate support system of friends and/or families?
- Am I financially independent?
- Am I excessively emotionally dependent on the person/s I am about to come out to?

Here are some examples of situations in which you need to do a lot of thinking and maybe even wait before you do come out:

- You are in the middle of your studies and are financially dependent on the people who you want to come out to.
- You're still confused about your orientation and don't have anyone to talk to or any place to go if ..

## 14. Making a Coming Out Plan

“Knowing WHEN to come out is sometimes as important as knowing HOW to come out”

..the worst happens. You may also feel that your orientation would lead to ostracism from your religious community and this is not some thing you can face.

- You face the risk of physical violence if you come out.
- You face the risk of being forced to see a psychiatrist or being committed to an institution if you come out.
- You are living at home, are financially dependent on your parents, don't have a job or the prospect of one
- Coming out is guaranteed to lose you your job and you have no back-up

## 15. Making a Coming Out Plan

“I haven't lost a single friend. In fact, I've met some wonderful people through queer groups.”



“Coming out to myself was the hardest bit for me-it took me several years. I grew increasingly aware of the fact that I was attracted

to women whereas men left me cold... Until one day, during a conversation with a friend, it finally hit me. I wasn't straight. I never had been straight. And I'd been hiding from it for the longest time to the detriment of my emotional and mental health. It took me some weeks after the initial realization to call myself a 'lesbian'. I also did a lot of queer-themed reading and movie watching before I felt I was ready to talk about it with anyone else. My emotions and desires are no longer things that I hide from, and I think I'm emotionally and mentally a lot healthier because of that.

I haven't lost a single friend. In fact, I've met some wonderful people through queer groups. For the first time in my life, I've connected with people who've faced similar struggles and had similar lived experiences. And it's been wonderful. - Aditi Chaturvedi

## 16. Telling Family members

Your parents belong to a different generation altogether. Be patient with them

No matter what your age is, coming out to your family is never a easy thing to do. You're not the only one who feels afraid of the consequences. But if you're 18, or financially dependent on your family, you need to be very careful.

Some reactions you should prepare yourself for:

- Your family may be hurt. They may cry and feel embarrassed, while others will be proud that you've been honest with them about your true self
- Before they come to terms with the reality, they may be upset that certain dreams they had for you may now never be realized
- You might be told that being gay is unnatural, deviant or sinful. They may even pree you for "therapy"
- Just remember that initial reactions may not always last

Your parents belong to a different generation altogether. Be patient with..

## 17. Telling Family members

“I blurted out, “Mom I’m gay”. She obviously was shocked.”

them. Educate them. Introduce them to your circle of LGBT friends and the community at large. Keep in mind always, that this is a big news and that they’ll take time to absorb it.

“And HEY!!!

Your family needs to ‘come out’ to your reality, and they need time. Which means, they ALSO need time.

You might have reached your destination; they may be still in transit though.”



“One day blurted out, “Mom I’m gay”. She obviously was shocked. And then I had to battle with answers to the flood of questions that followed. “How do I know?

Have I done it with a girl? Have it done it with a guy? Is it genetic? Who else is gay? Are all your friends gay? Are you just saying this because you don’t want to get married? Maybe we should see a sexologist or a psychiatrist or a counselor?”

- Shubh Sharma

## 18. Glossary of Terms

**Bisexual, Bi** An individual who is physically, romantically and/or emotionally attracted to men and women. Bisexuals need not have had sexual experience with both men and women; in fact, they need not have had any sexual experience at all to identify as bisexual.

**Closeted** Describes a person who is not open about his or her sexual orientation.

**Coming Out** A lifelong process of self-acceptance. People forge a lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender identity first to themselves and then may reveal it to others. Publicly identifying one's orientation may or may not be part of coming out.

**Gay** The adjective used to describe people whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attractions are to people of the same sex (e.g., gay man, gay people). In contemporary contexts, lesbian (n. or adj.) is often a preferred term for women. Avoid identifying gay people as “homosexuals” is an outdated term considered derogatory and offensive to many lesbian and gay people.

## 19. Glossary of Terms

**Homophobia** Fear of lesbians and gay men. Prejudice is usually a more accurate description of hatred or antipathy toward LGBT people.

**Lesbian** A woman whose enduring physical, romantic and/or emotional attraction is to other women. Some lesbians may prefer to identify as gay (adj.) or as gay women. Avoid identifying lesbians as “homosexuals,” a derogatory

**LGBT / GLBT** Acronym for “lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender.” LGBT and/or GLBT are often used because they are more inclusive of the diversity of the community. Care should be taken to ensure that audiences are not confused by their use.

**Queer** Traditionally a pejorative term, queer has been appropriated by some LGBT people to describe themselves. However, it is not universally accepted even within the LGBT community and should be avoided unless quoting or describing someone who self-identifies that way.

*Source: GLAAD*

## About Mingle's Coming Out Project



Mingle thanks its volunteers who helped in researching and drafting this Coming Out guide. Also, many thanks to those who shared with us their coming out stories and allowed us to use their photographs.

Cover Photographs:

By Dinudey Baidya  
& Amit Mitra  
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In Collaboration with:



Mingle (**Mission for Indian Gay & Lesbian Empowerment**) is a nation-wide advocacy group and think-tank for LGBT equality in India. This guide is the first in a series of 'Coming Out' guides to be published and distributed free for LGBT youth and family in India. The three guides in this series are:

- (i) Coming Out guide for gay/lesbian youth
- (ii) A family's guide to LGBT Indians
- (iii) Transgender Visibility Guide

**You can help us in the Coming Out Project in many ways:**

Give us your **feedback**. Tell us if this guide helped you. Is there anything else you want added?

**Share** with us your coming out experience to be published in future editions of this booklet.

Help us **translate** this guide into as many Indian languages as possible.

**Donate** to keep this guide in circulation free of cost.

**Write to us at** [contact@mingle.org.in](mailto:contact@mingle.org.in)