**When Someone Comes Out to You**

**When someone comes out to you:**

* They may have chosen to come out to you because you are a close friend, roommate, or family member and they want to have an honest and genuine relationship with you.
* They may come out to you because you are able to assist them with a concern or address policies that impact them.
* They may feel you are a person who will be understanding and accepting and so trust you with this very personal information.
* They may not be sure how you’ll react, but they prefer to be honest and are tired of putting time and energy into hiding their identity.
* They may come out to you because some aspect of your professional relationship makes it difficult to continue to hide.

**What not to say:**

* I knew it!
* No, you’re not.
* So what? Who cares?
* You’re just going through a phase.
* You aren’t attracted to me, are you?
* How did you decide?
* You’re just confused.
* Why didn’t you tell me sooner?
* You are just doing this because it’s cool to be trans now.
* Maybe you can find a therapist who can help you get over this.
* Why would you want to make things harder on yourself?
* Is this just because you’ve had trouble finding a girlfriend/boyfriend?
* I don’t want you to go to hell.

**Some questions to ask:**

* Is there some way I can help?
* Have I ever offended you unknowingly?

**Remember:**

* Don’t assume in advance that you know what it means for them to be LGBTQIA+; every person’s experience is different.
* Consider it an honor that they have trusted you with this very personal information. Thank them for trusting you.
* Clarify with them what level of confidentiality they expect from you. They may not want you to tell anyone at all.\*
* Remember that the student has not changed. They are still the same person you knew before the disclosure.
* Let the student know that you feel the same way about them as you always have and that they are still the same person.
* If you are shocked, try not to let the surprise lead you to view or treat the student any differently. Remember your role as an RA.
* Challenge traditional norms. You may need to consider your own beliefs about sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender roles.
* If there are questions you can’t answer, or if the student does need support, be prepared to refer them.

**When the person is transgender:**

* Validate the person’s gender identity and expression.
* Use the name and pronouns that the person requests.
* **Never, ever** use the words: it, tranny, shemale, heshe.
* Never invade someone’s privacy by asking about their anatomy.
* Remember that gender identity is separate from sexual orientation.

**Advice for roommates:**

* Don’t assume your roommate is hitting on you or is attracted to you. Just like straight people are not attracted to everyone of the “opposite” gender, LGBTQIA+ people aren’t either.
* Do learn what you can about the issues.
* Don’t “out” them to other people. You can ask who else knows and if it is okay to talk about it with other people.
* Do try to keep an open mind. Learning about people different from you is one of the things college is about.
* Don’t ask personal questions. Allow them to tell you what they wish.
* Don’t spend the rest of the semester avoiding your roommate. If you need to talk with someone about your concerns, pick a friend, counselor, or RA. Remember to keep confidentiality.
* Do go easy on yourself. You might slip up and ask a question that your roommate thinks is silly or ignorant or you might misstep on pronouns, but if you approach the situation with an open mind and compassion, things will go much better.

**Quick reference:**

* Pride Center – 865-974-7803, [pridecenter@utk.edu](mailto:pridecenter@utk.edu)
  + Bonnie Johnson (she/her/hers), Coordinator – [bonnie@utk.edu](mailto:bonnie@utk.edu)
* Bias Incident Report – online reporting form, non-emergencies, <https://bias.utk.edu/>
* 974-HELP – receive help for yourself or another distressed student, <https://dos.utk.edu/974-help/our-approach/>
* Office of Title IX – support for sexual assault and misconduct, <https://titleix.utk.edu/>
* Counseling Center – 865-974-2196, <https://counselingcenter.utk.edu/>
* Safe Zone – an educational program focused on the LGBTQIA+ community, <https://safezone.utk.edu/>

\*Confidentiality: You will have to break confidentiality if you feel the person may harm themselves or others. If you are a mandatory reporter, you will have to report any sexual misconduct, <https://titleix.utk.edu/am-i-a-mandatory-reporter/>