Dear Alice,

How do you think I should go about coming out of the closet to my mother?

Answer

Dear Reader,

Bravo to you for the desire to be honest with your mother and true to yourself. Coming out is a personal choice that can be both intimidating and rewarding, and by considering all of your options and garnering support from others in advance, you’ll be well prepared for the conversation.

It’s a good idea to plan what you want to say to your mother before initiating the conversation. It might be helpful to have a few important points in mind that you want to cover in case you get stuck. It’s also beneficial to choose an appropriate time when you and your mother are able to have a calm, private, and thoughtful discussion free of time constraints and interruptions. Alternatively, if you feel you can express yourself better on paper, writing a letter is a great option.

You might feel better talking to your mother after you break the ice with someone else, so consider coming out to a supportive friend, teacher, or relative first. You can also meet with a counselor or other trusted health care provider to help you plan for the conversation. By allowing your friends, family, and community to support you throughout this process, you’ll feel more confident and ready to talk.
Coming out is a highly individualized process, and you can be as direct or subtle as you wish. The most important factor is to be open and explain your feelings in your own words. As an example, the direct approach would be, "Hi mom, I'm gay... this is important to me, and I would like to talk with you about it." Or, "I'm a lesbian... if you'd like, we can discuss what this means." Directness can get you right to the "where will we go from here" stage. Another approach is: "Mom, there's something important I'd like to talk with you about. You know how much your love and support mean to me. I'm depending on your strength when I talk with you about this." A more subtle way of introducing the topic may consist of bringing up signs that your mom may already have picked up on. For example, you could ask your mom, "Do you remember when we watched [insert gay-themed TV show/movie title here] together? Well..."

If you're feeling doubtful, it may help to make sure that you have enough social support to cope with your mother's response before telling her how you're feeling. Additionally, if she does have a negative response, give her some time to think. Initial reactions are not always predictive of long term ones. For this reason, it's a great idea to come to the discussion with reliable resources. Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays [2] (PFLAG) is a fantastic resource, as well as the Human Rights Campaign's Coming Out Center [3]. Straight Parents, Gay Children by Robert Bernstein and Coming out to Parents: A Two-Way Survival Guide for Lesbians and Gay Men and their Parents by Mary Borhek are both highly regarded books that may also help both you and your mother feel comfortable with your sexual identity.

Coming out can help you live more freely, with less stress, and more self-esteem. However, coming out can also be challenging in certain environments and situations. If you need more specific advice about your particular situation, reach out to a counselor. If you need a little inspiration, check out the It Gets Better Project [4].

There's really no one right way to come out. It's important to be honest and to trust yourself. Regardless of how you choose to come out, allow a moment of reflection to give yourself credit for the strength it takes to reach out and connect with your family in a new way.

Good luck and congrats,

Alice!

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Resources