

'COMING OUT' SNAKES AND LADDERS

Gay
Lesbian
Bisexual
Sexual orientation
LGBT / LGBTQ
Coming out
Violence
Value
Questioning

- ✓ 1. To sensitise learners to issues faced by gay, lesbian, bisexual, and questioning people.
- ✓ 2. To promote acceptance and respect for all people irrespective of their sexual orientation
- ✓ 3. To create empathy and support for LGBTQ or questioning youth.

🕒 45 min - 1 hour

Game Board: 'Snakes and Ladders' (provided)

- ★ Game Cards (provided)
- Dice template/spinner (provided)
- Handout: 'Coming Out'

PROCEDURE

- 1 Print one 'snakes and ladders' board for every 3-5 learners in the class. Printing or copying the boards onto stiff paper will make them sturdier and more durable, but ordinary paper will also work.
- 2 Divide learners into groups of 3-5 and have them make a small circle with their desks. Hand out a board to each group.
- 3 Ask each learner to find a small object (coin, eraser) to use as their game piece.
- 4 Explain that the game is about '**coming out**'. All of the participants are to imagine that they are **LGBT**, and have known about their **sexual orientation** for some time, but have kept it secret until now. Now, they are going to 'come out' and share that information with others.
- 5 Explain the rules of the game as follows:
 - a. Going around the circle, each player takes a turn by rolling the dice and moving the designated number of blocks on the 'snakes and ladders' board.
 - b. When learners land on a space that has a ladder, they can climb up the ladder and skip the intervening blocks. Where learners land on snakes, they have to slide backwards as indicated.
 - c. When someone lands on the squares marked with a question mark they should draw a card and follow the instructions provided (for example, how many spaces to move ahead or backwards or skip a turn).
 - d. The object of the game is to reach the end of the trail on the board.
- 6 Once learners have finished playing the game, debrief the activity with the entire class using the following questions
 - a. How did you feel when you received negative reactions?
 - b. How realistic is this activity?
 - c. What kind of support do **LGBT** people need in order to 'come out'?
 - d. How do you think **LGBT** people feel when they lose the support of those they love and care about?
 - e. Where can support come from?

- 7 At the end of the lesson it is important to emphasise that 'coming out' is a difficult and personal decision that may create anxiety or concern for **LGBT** youth. There are some considerations that may make this process easier:

Coming out suggestions:

- First consider the possible implications of coming out to different people. If you think that coming out may threaten your safety in any way then wait until you are older, or have better support systems.
- Decide who you want to come out to. You do not have to tell everyone, or everyone in your family, or all your friends. Start with people who are likely to be supportive and accepting.
- If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, and if it is ok with them, refer to that person by name and let people know that you care about them. Consider having your family or friends meet your 'close friend' before you come out. This may help people associate your coming out with someone that they are already familiar with and that they know is important to you. This makes the idea seem less abstract.
- Get in touch with a local organisation for information and support, and where you can refer your friends and family once you have come out to them.
- If you do decide to come out, set up a time and place where you will feel comfortable and safe.
- Come out when you are feeling positive and good about yourself.
- Prepare for a whole range of responses. Reactions can range from anger, shock, and denial to acceptance and celebration. Do not be too upset if the first reaction is negative, many people take some time to process new information and may come around later.
- If possible, try to have a family member, friend or local organisation ready to support you after you come out.

This list of suggestions is provided at the end of this exercise. It can be discussed with the class, printed and put up in the classroom. By doing this, you make the information available to all learners in the class.

There is also information provided at the end of the lesson about what to do if someone 'comes out' to you. This may be useful to all learners, and could be put up in the classroom.

TEACHER TIPS



General

This exercise provides the opportunity for learners to empathise or identify with the feelings of **LGBT** youth who choose to come out to friends and family. It is important therefore to spend some time eliciting their feelings about the exercise.

Sexual orientation is a controversial topic and some teachers may feel uncomfortable talking about it. As a teacher it is important that you create an environment of respect and understanding for all your learners, and that your personal views or religious beliefs do not prevent you from doing this. Remember that discussions about sexual orientation are not about moral judgement, or religious views, but about treating people equally and fairly, and respecting other people's right to engage in mutually consensual relationships of their choice, as afforded to them by the law.

Teaching about sexual orientation may help learners be more empathetic to other people who they see as 'different'. Remember that young people need accurate information and opportunity to discuss issues that may be difficult for them. They should be encouraged to share their feelings, but reminded that discrimination, hate and violence are always wrong.

As you lead this activity, remember that there are probably **gay**, **lesbian**, **bisexual**, and teens **questioning** their orientation, in your class. It is important that you make LGBT learners (whether they have **come out** or not) feel acknowledged and understood. You will not know the **sexual orientation** of every participant, so be very sure to use inclusive and affirming language. For example, say 'we,' 'all people,' and 'some people,' not 'they' or 'people like them.'

Should a learner come out to you, the information provided at the end of the lesson will be useful.

Never ask learners to disclose their sexual orientation.



Making the Link with Gender and Violence

Alert your learners to the fact that those who are seen as different are often more vulnerable to **violence**. Seeing **LGBT** people as 'other' or abnormal, makes them easier targets for violence. In order to curb violence against all vulnerable groups, we need to focus on what we have in common, and how we each have **value**, and how no person is less than another.



Assessment Ideas

Coming out and **sexual orientation** are difficult personal issues. We encourage discussion and do not recommend assessments based on this topic.



IDENTITY CARDS

Print and cut out. Cards are drawn when reaching blocks on the board that are designated as ‘?’

You decide to tell a friend, who has no problem with your news. He thanks you for being honest and acts no differently towards you, accepting you for who you are.

MOVE FORWARD 2 SQUARES

You decide to tell your cousin. She asks you how this could have happened, but after a long discussion she becomes a bit more at ease with your news.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE

You tell people in your class about being gay. You receive a mixed response. Some people accept you. Some don't know what to think. You remain a part of the class community and, with time, you will fit in as you once did.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE

You tell a close friend, who is hesitant and annoyed you've waited so long to tell her. You argue, and she says she doesn't know who you really are.

MOVE BACK 2 SQUARES

You tell your parents and your father completely rejects the thought of being related to a person who is LGBT. Much like some of your friends, your father says he is disgusted.

SKIP A TURN

Someone tells your church community that you are gay. The community reacts with hatred. They tell you that someone like you does not belong in the church. Those who had supported you no longer speak to you or acknowledge you.

MOVE BACK 5 SQUARES

You tell a friend who says that she has to run to class. You are confident that he will eventually accept you and understand that being LGBT is a part of who you are.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE

You tell your best friend, who has always been your confidante. She tells you that being LGBT is wrong and that she cannot associate with anyone like that.

SKIP A TURN

Your co-workers at the restaurant where you are a waiter begin to approach you and let you know that they have heard the rumours and that they do not care, they will support you.

MOVE FORWARD 1 SQUARE

You tell your brother, and he says that is proud that you have decided to come out and tells you that he will always be there to support you.

MOVE FORWARD 4 SQUARES

Your family throws you out of the house for being gay, and you join the 20 - 40% of homeless youth who identify as LGBT.

GO BACK TO THE START

Your boss reacts supportively to your news, letting you know that you do good work and that's all that matters.

STAY WHERE YOU ARE

You tell your mom, but the conversation does not go exactly as you had planned. She cries, and says that she doesn't know where she went wrong.

MOVE BACK 2 SQUARES

You tell the other players on your soccer team. They accept your identity, and say that you are a welcome member of the team, regardless of your sexual orientation.

MOVE FORWARD 3 SQUARES

At school, rumours have started to spread among people you're not friends with. Everyone appears to think you are LGBT, even though you have not confirmed the rumours. Some people speak to you less than they did before, but nothing changes drastically.

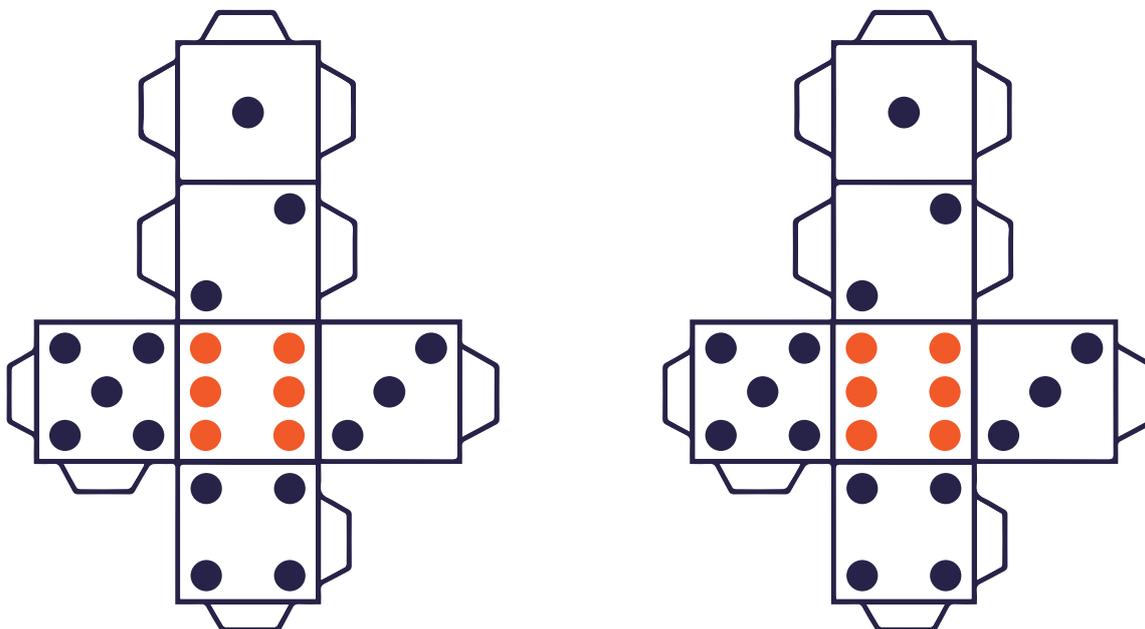
STAY WHERE YOU ARE

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Dice for Snakes and Ladders

THE DICE

If you need dice, print and cut out the shapes below. One is a cube dice, which you can cut out and glue into the correct shape. The other is a spinner. Cut it out and stick a match or a pin through it so it spins. You can also cut a cube from an eraser and use a pencil to draw the numbers on the dice.



'COMING OUT'

WHAT TO DO IF YOU'RE THINKING ABOUT 'COMING OUT':

- **Consider the possible implications** of coming out to different people. If you think that coming out may threaten your safety in any way then wait until you are older, or have better support systems.
- **Decide who you want to come out to.** You do not have to tell everyone, or everyone in your family, or all your friends. Start with people who are likely to be supportive and accepting.
- **If you have a boyfriend or girlfriend, refer to that person by name and let people know that you care about them.** Consider having your family or friends meet your 'close friend' before you come out.

This may help people associate your coming out with someone that they are already familiar with and that they know is important to you. This makes the idea seem less abstract.

- **Get in touch with a local LGBTQ organisation** for information and support, and who you can refer your friends and family to once you have come out to them.
- If you do decide to come out, **set up a time and place where you will feel comfortable and safe.**
- **Come out when you are feeling positive and good about yourself.**
- **Prepare for a whole range of responses.** Reactions can range from anger, shock, and denial to acceptance and celebration. Do not be too upset if the first reaction is negative, many people take some time to process new information and may come around later.
- **Have a family member, friend or local organisation ready to support you after** you come out, if possible

WHAT TO DO IF SOMEONE 'COMES OUT' TO YOU:

- **Listen to what they say.** Be respectful, and allow them to set the tone of the conversation. Comfort them if they are upset. Thank them for trusting you.
- **Don't make assumptions about what they are trying to tell you.** Let them tell you in their own words, and at their own pace.
- **Ask questions that are appropriate to your level of familiarity with the person.** Remember that they may not want to, or be in a position to answer all of your questions. Don't make them feel interrogated, uncomfortable or self-conscious.
- **Don't ask questions about the person's sex life.** Even if you're very close or have discussed your sex lives before, don't talk about this during their coming out conversation.
- **Don't use slang or offensive language.** Wait for them to indicate how they would like to identify (e.g. gay, dyke, lesbian).
- **Don't point out that you suspected they may be gay all along.** This may be hurtful or make them feel ashamed.
- Ask them who they are telling. Everyone's process of coming out is different, and some people like to tell only selected people, while others are much more open. If this person isn't going public with the information, you want to be sure to know that.
- **Respect their privacy.** Just because they have come out to you doesn't mean that they want to discuss every detail of their relationships and history with you.
- **Don't assume that your friend is automatically attracted to you.** Your friend is coming out to you because he/she values your friendship, and not because they have feelings for you.
- **Don't offer advice or be judgmental.** The person who is coming out has likely struggled with the decision to do so, and being judgmental or offering unsolicited advice is disrespectful and may hurt them.
- **Treat them the same as you did before they came out.** Your friend is still the same person you knew before their disclosure. Assure your friend that nothing changes between you.