#WorkingWithPride

Coming Out at Work



Produced by myGwork

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Disclaimer

This guide is intended for informational and best practice purposes only. It is written for two readers: the person deciding whether, when and how to come out at work, and the colleague or manager they choose to tell. Nothing in it is legal advice. Protection for LGBTQ+ employees varies by country, is subject to frequent change, and may be partial or absent where you work. Please check what applies to you before acting on anything in part one, and seek independent advice where needed.





You do not owe anyone this

Nobody is required to come out at work. Not to be a good colleague, not to be authentic, not to help the organisation's statistics. If you decide to, it should be because it makes your working life better, and on terms you chose.

Coming out at work is not one conversation. It is a series of small disclosures, each to a different audience, and you control the order, the pace and the stopping point. Telling one person is complete in itself.

Who is this guide for?

Part one is for you: four questions to answer before you decide, a map of how far "out" goes, and six situations with the words to use. **Part two** is for the colleague or manager you tell: what to say in the first thirty seconds, what to do in the week after, and what to leave alone.

Four questions before you decide

Answer these on paper, not in your head. Writing them down turns a feeling into a plan, and a plan has an order.

1. Why now?

There is usually a trigger: a new partner, a transition you have started, a remark you are tired of absorbing, or the cost of editing yourself every day. Name it. If the answer is "someone else thinks I should", wait.

2. Who first?

One person, not a group. The best first person has no power over you and has handled other people's news well. The first conversation is a rehearsal for every later one, so choose an audience that makes rehearsing safe.

3. What do you want to happen afterwards?

Be specific. "I want to mention my wife without pausing." "I want my pronouns used in meetings." "I want the HR record changed and nothing else." The person you tell will ask what you need; have the answer ready.

4. What is your exit if it goes badly?

Not because it will, but because knowing the exit makes the conversation calmer. Who is your second person? Which policy will you point to? Is there a network? You do not have to use the exit. You just have to know it is there.

Check the architecture before you check the people

Read the equality policy and the benefits page before you tell anyone. Does partner healthcare cover a same-sex partner? Is there a transition-at-work policy? Has anyone senior ever spoken about being LGBTQ+? A policy that says nothing is information you want before the conversation, not after.

How far "out" goes

Out is not a switch. It is six separate audiences, and most people are at different levels with each of them for years. You can skip a level, and you can stop at any one indefinitely.

1. One trusted colleague

Complete in itself. Many people stop here, and having one person at work who knows matters more than most people expect.

2. Your manager

The level that changes your administrative life: leave for a wedding, a partner on your benefits, a name on your email.

3. Your immediate team

Where it stops being a disclosure and starts being a fact. Usually best done by mentioning something ordinary rather than by announcement.

4. The record

HR systems, the staff directory, a pronoun field, a changed name. The level that persists when you change team.

5. The wider organisation

The network, a profile, a Pride post with your name on it. Optional, visible, and the one to think hardest about before you cannot take it back.

6. Clients, suppliers and the public

A different calculation, because the people on the other side did not choose your employer's values. Your organisation should take the risk here, not you.

You will do this more than once. A new team, a new manager, a new job, a colleague who joined after you came out: every one resets the level to zero for that audience.

Part one · Situation 1

Telling one colleague

You have chosen the person. You have a quiet moment that is not the end of a long day and not the minute before a meeting.

What to say

"I want to tell you something I haven't told anyone here yet. I'm gay. I'm not asking you to do anything with it, I just wanted one person at work to know."

"Can I ask you to keep it to yourself for now? I'll tell other people myself, when I'm ready."

What not to say

"This is going to sound weird" or "you probably already guessed". Both apologise for the information before it arrives, and invite the other person to minimise it. Say the thing plainly. It is not weird, and whether they guessed is irrelevant.

How you'll know it worked

They thank you, they ask what you need, and the next conversation you have with them is about work. The relief you feel in the following days is the point, and it is real.

Part one · Situation 2

Telling your manager

You need something to change: leave, a benefit, a name, pronouns in meetings. Or you simply want them to hear it from you before they hear it elsewhere.

What to say

"I'd like ten minutes, not about work. I want you to know that I'm bisexual, and my partner's name is Dana. Nothing changes about how I work. There is one practical thing: I'd like Dana added to my benefits, and I'd rather you heard it from me than from the form."

"I don't need you to do anything else. If I do, I'll ask."

What not to say

Nothing at all about whether this will affect your performance, your promotion or your team. Raising it yourself plants the question. If your manager raises it, that is information about your manager.

How you'll know it worked

The practical thing happens within the week without you chasing it. Your manager does not mention it again unless you do, and does not treat you more carefully in the next meeting.

Part one · Situation 3

Letting the team know

You are ready for it to be a fact rather than a secret, and you would rather not make a speech.

What to say

In the Monday stand-up, when someone asks about your weekend: "Good. My boyfriend and I finally painted the kitchen." Then the next item.

If someone follows up: "Yes, his name's Tom. About three years. Anyway, the kitchen is now a questionable shade of green."

What not to say

"I have an announcement." An announcement makes it an event, and an event needs a reaction, which puts everyone in the room on the spot. A fact mentioned in passing asks nothing of anyone, and is much harder to make awkward.

How you'll know it worked

Somebody asks after Tom by name two weeks later, unprompted. That is the moment it stopped being news.

This method relies on one or two people in the room who already know and will carry on normally. That is what the first person was for.

Part one · Situation 4

Correcting an assumption in the moment

"How's your husband?" "Bring your wife to the dinner." You did not plan to say anything today, and now there is a choice to make in under two seconds.

What to say

"Wife, actually. She's well, thanks." Then the thing you were going to say anyway.

If you are not ready: "He's fine, thanks" is also allowed. Correcting an assumption is a choice you make each time, not a debt you owe the room.

What not to say

A long explanation. The shorter the correction, the less it costs you and the less it costs them. Three words and move on. The person who asked will be far more embarrassed than you, and brevity is the kindest thing you can do for both of you.

How you'll know it worked

They say "sorry, of course" or nothing at all, and the conversation continues. Next time, they get it right.

Part one · Situation 5

Coming out as trans or non-binary

You are changing your name, your pronouns, how you present, or all three, and some of it needs the organisation's systems and your colleagues' habits to change with you. Sequence matters most here.

What to say to your manager or HR

"I'm transitioning. From the first of next month I'll be using the name Sam and they/them pronouns. I'd like to agree a plan with you for three things: the systems, who tells the team and when, and what we do when someone gets it wrong."

"I'd like to be the one who tells my team, with you in the room. I don't want it announced for me."

What not to say

Nothing about your medical history, your body, or your timeline beyond the date things change at work. If asked, "that's not something I discuss at work" is a complete answer.

The three-part plan

Systems. List every place your old name lives and give the list to one named person with a date. **People.** Decide who hears it from you and who from your manager; a four-sentence note you drafted, sent on the day, prevents the rumour version. **Mistakes.** Agree in advance: a three-second correction, no apology speech, carry on.

Part one · Situation 6

When it goes badly

The response was silence, a joke, an objection, a "we don't need to make a thing of it", or a change in how you are treated that you can feel but cannot yet prove.

What to say

In the moment, to buy yourself time: "Okay. I'm going to leave it there for today." Then leave it there. You do not have to repair the conversation on the spot.

Afterwards, to your second person: "I told my manager on Tuesday and it didn't go well. I'd like to tell you what was said while I still remember it exactly."

What not to do

Argue the case. The person who reacted badly will not be persuaded in that conversation, and trying costs energy you need for the next steps. And do not decide alone that it was your fault for raising it. It was not.

Write it down the same day

Date, time, who was present, what was said as close to verbatim as you can, and what you said. Email it to yourself so it has a timestamp. Then you have three doors: the LGBTQ+ network, HR with a specific ask, and outside advice. If you are not sure where to start, ask myGwork and we will point you to the right organisation for your country.



Part two · For the colleague they tell

The first thirty seconds

Someone has just come out to you. They chose you because they have watched how you handle other people's news. The next half-minute decides whether they were right. There are four things to do, in this order.

Thank

"Thank you for telling me."

Ask

"Is there anything you'd like me to do, or not do?"

Follow

"Who else knows? I'll follow your lead on that."

Return

Then go back to whatever you were talking about before.

What not to say

"I always knew." It makes their decision about your perceptiveness, and suggests they were less private than they thought.

"It doesn't matter to me." You mean it kindly. They hear that the thing they just risked something to tell you is unimportant. Try "it doesn't change anything, and I'm glad you told me".

"Have you told your parents / your partner / Priya?" That is their list, not yours.

"Are you sure?" Yes. Nobody says this by accident.

Any question about sex, surgery, or how it works. Ever.

If you slip up in the moment

"Sorry. That came out wrong. What I meant is I'm glad you told me." One sentence of repair, then back to the four steps. A clumsy response corrected in ten seconds does less damage than a polished one that arrives after a visible pause.

How you'll know it worked

They look relieved rather than braced. They mention their partner, or use their new name, in front of you within the week without checking your face first. Nothing about how you work together changes, except that there is one less thing they have to edit.

The week after

The thirty seconds were the easy part. The next week is where goodwill goes wrong, usually by someone doing too much rather than too little.

Change nothing they did not ask for

No new check-ins, no softer feedback, no reassigning the client who "might not be comfortable". The most respectful thing is to be exactly who you were on Monday.

Update records only with consent

A pronoun field, a changed name, a partner on benefits: all of it goes in the system when they say so. "Shall I update the directory now or would you rather wait?" is the whole conversation.

Correct in the third person

When someone else uses the wrong name or pronoun and the person is not in the room: "She. Carry on." Three seconds, no speech.

Do not out them for them

Not to HR, not to your own manager, not "just so they're aware", and not as a positive example in a diversity meeting. The list of who knows belongs to them.

Check in once, then stop

"How did the rest of the week go?" Once, around day five, in private. A daily "you okay?" turns one disclosure into a condition.

Plan for your own slip

You will get a name or pronoun wrong at some point. The response is "sorry, Sam" and the next word of the sentence. Not an apology speech.

If you manage them, read your own policy

Know what leave they are entitled to, what the benefits cover, and whether there is a transition-at-work policy, before anything lands on your desk.

The pocket card

Eight scripts, one page. Four for the person coming out, four for the person they tell.

If you are coming out

- **Tell one person:** "I want to tell you something I haven't told anyone here. I'm gay. I'm not asking you to do anything with it."
- **Tell your manager:** "Nothing changes about how I work. There's one practical thing, and I'd rather you heard it from me than from the form."
- **Correct an assumption:** "Wife, actually. She's well, thanks."
- **Close a bad conversation:** "Okay. I'm going to leave it there for today." Then write it down, with the date, the same day.

If someone comes out to you

- **First:** "Thank you for telling me."
- **Second:** "Is there anything you'd like me to do, or not do?"
- **Third:** "Who else knows? I'll follow your lead on that." Then back to work.
- **When you slip:** "Sorry, Sam." And the next word of the sentence.



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If you have any questions, please contact:

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