

What to do if someone comes out to you

Red Balloon of the Air
Guide Series



Red Balloon
LEARNER CENTRES
For the recovery of bullied children

Six things everyone should know about how you should respond to a young person who comes out to you

If you are in the privileged position of being a trusted adult to a young person who wants to come out to you, you will want to be equipped with the right language and sentiment in order to support the young person. Read on for some key tips from Janine, our very own Red Balloon of the Air's LGBTQ+ Champion.

THANK THEM



It is awesome that you are their chosen Trusted Adult so thank them for telling you and sharing their story with you. Remember that coming out to someone is still a big deal and can feel very scary.

SHOW UNCONDITIONAL POSITIVE REGARD

This can be a very vulnerable moment for a young person so make sure that you sure them unconditional positive regard and immediate acceptance. This will have started by you thanking them in the first place but check your reaction. Don't act shocked or negative as this can give the impression that being LGBTQ+ is bad and we know it's not. Smile – this is a brave and positive step.



LET THEM BE IN THE DRIVING SEAT

Just because a young person has come out to you does not mean they are ready to come out to everyone in all the different parts of their life. As Stonewall says “Just because someone may decide to come out to (someone), it doesn’t mean they have to come out to everyone. It’s quite common for people to be out in certain areas of their lives but not in others.”



Ask them:

- Have you told anyone else?
- Who do you want to know?
- Do you need any help of any kind?

HELP THEM



Once you ask those questions your young person may want some help telling other people, they may want you to be there when they tell others, help them change their names, pronouns, email address, profile name, direct them to other people if they want to speak to others or do nothing.

If your young person’s coming out journey starts with you and that’s all they want to do right now then leave it there. Do nothing but be there if you are needed.

EDUCATE YOURSELF



If a young person comes out to you as a gender or sexuality that you know little about, it is okay to ask them questions if you have the right relationship and environment. Afterwards, check out some resources from charities such as Stonewall and Mermaids or you can ask us. Don't make it their job to educate you.

SAFEGUARDING CONCERNS

Firstly remember there is no set formula that works for every young person and every context but remember that a student coming out to you in itself is NOT a safeguarding concern. You do not need to report it to the safeguarding team unless you feel they are at risk of harm (from themselves or others), and then you would treat it like a normal concern.



Red Balloon of the Air have a number of students who are part of the LGBTQ+ community who have come to us as a result of disengagement from school and poor mental health linked to a feeling that they don't fit in.

We are proud to have a LGBTQ+ champion with Janine Holmes and to be working with the Kite Trust on our journey to being awarded the Rainbow Flag Award. (A national quality assurance framework for primary, secondary and SEND schools and colleges.)