



## A Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual Or Transgender Educator's Process For Coming Out: An Attorney's Perspective

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**1. Attempt** to get language negotiated in your collective bargaining agreement that prevents discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity/expression.

**2. Evaluate** your strength as an educator and assess whether potential negative pressure will jeopardize your position. Evaluate the strength, competence and support you will receive from your building administrator. Consider if because of the nature of your position, coming out would cause more concern (i.e. Coach in locker room).

**3. Determine** at what level you desire to be out. Remember that "being out" can occur at many levels. Levels "a" through "d" provide some protections; levels "e" and "f" are moderately risky; levels "g" through "i" are highly risky in hostile environments. That's not fair. But it's a fact.

a. Joining LGBT rights organizations (HRC, NGLTF, Lambda, pride parade, etc.)

b. Being involved politically in lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender (LGBT) issues (supporting gay candidates, writing letters to the editor, appearing on talk shows)

c. Running for political office as an openly LGBT candidate.

d. Lobbying for LGBT-themed books in the school library, advocating that LGBT issues be taught in the curriculum, advocating that training for school employees be established concerning sexual minority students and that an LGBT week be established in school to acquaint student and employees with LGBT issues.

e. Honestly interacting socially with adults without actually stating sexual orientation. (bringing your partner or same sex dates to faculty parties)

f. Coming out to fellow employees. (making statements concerning your sexual orientation in faculty room or at faculty meetings, etc.)

g. Wearing symbols in school or on your car parked in the school parking lot, which imply that you are LGBT. (pink triangle)

h. Coming out to students. (putting your wedding picture on your desk, discussing your sexual orientation in class as part of a lesson, or just talking to students on a casual basis)

i. Transitioning genders.

**4. When assessing** at what level to be out, consider how much experience you have had at being out in other settings. Generally the less experience you have had the better off you are at a lower level of being out.

**5. Consider discussing the decision** with your supervisor before-the-fact. Be prepared, if you do this, to explain the **value to students** of your being out, not just to yourself, and the relevance of your coming out to the curriculum. (e.g. *"I plan to discuss my recent marriage when we get to the unit on civil disobedience. It's a way to make the concept concrete and immediate."* or *"I'd like to make sure students have a chance to discuss my new name so that they aren't afraid or confused as I transition."* as opposed to *"I have a right to bring my whole self to work."* – even though, morally, you do have that right.

**5. Be aware** that activism can lead to conflict. The more you make your sexual orientation an integral part of you rather than engaging in activism in the education community, the less likely there will be confrontation. (i.e. Referring to your partner in a conversation makes your sexual orientation an integral part of you; making a gay/lesbian bulletin board in your room unrelated to curriculum is activism. Each has its place; the point is to be thoughtful about the risks you are willing to take.)



## THINGS TO DO IF YOU FEEL YOU ARE BEING TARGETED BECAUSE OF YOUR SEXUAL ORIENTATION

1. The earlier you get assistance, the better off you will be.
2. Notify your local president or UniServ representative immediately if there is indication that you are being discriminated against because of your sexual orientation or gender identity/expression. If you are not a member of a union, consult an attorney experienced in the area.
3. Keep a written record of all the incidents which concern you. Most likely you will have to document several incidents in order to show a pattern of behavior. The sooner you document a happening, the more reliable your testimony will be at any upcoming hearing.
4. If you know other LGBT individuals in your school district, check with them to see if they are experiencing similar discrimination. A district wide pattern of behavior would be more effective in getting a resolution that could include school district policy of nondiscrimination against sexual minorities.
5. If you are being disciplined you have a right to a representative to be present. Be sure and discuss with your representative prior to the meeting that you are concerned that the discipline is a result of your sexual orientation or your gender identity/expression. If a directive is being made to you, be sure that the directive is clear and unambiguous. (If the administrator, for example, informs you that you keep your private life out of the school setting, ask him/her to specifically state what he/she means. Vague directives lead to escalated discipline.)
6. Notify your local president or UniServ representative immediately if rumors start in the school setting concerning your sexual orientation or gender identity. This would include students, faculty, school employees, or parents talking about your sexual orientation or gender identity. This is especially true if you have chosen to stay in the closet, but rumors start anyway. If any administrator notifies you that she/he is starting an investigation concerning the rumors, notify your local president or UniServ representative immediately.
7. Follow all directives given by your administrator. A grievance can be filed later to dispute the directive. **Do not become insubordinate.** Too often persons who have a legitimate grievance lose on the insubordination issue.