

Coping with College Series

Coming Out to the Family Over the Holidays?

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For most students, going home for the holidays is a pleasant experience. Often people make plans to interact with family and friends. However, this can be a very difficult time for students that are lesbian or gay and not out to and/or accepted by their families. To bring home a "loved one" and be treated like everyone else in one's family is something everyone wants. For gays and lesbians, because of the secrets they must keep if not out, it can be a time of intense pain if they aren't able to share with their family. For this and other reasons, there might be a strong urge to come out to family during the holidays. If you are not out and the holidays are a stressful time for you to be around your family, there are things you can do to reduce the amount of stress. For instance, take a walk, read a book, watch a movie, go shopping, visit a friend, go out to dinner, visit a book store, call a supportive person, walk the dog, etc. It is important for you to deal with feeling overwhelmed and isolated.

If you choose to come out during the holidays, choose a supportive person. However, keep in mind that his/her reactions are unpredictable. If you are able to come out successfully to this person, she/he could assist you in sharing your story with others. Ask yourself what is the worst response you can imagine from individuals? If the worst scenario happened, how would you feel? What might you do? Also, be aware of your expectations of others' responses to your choosing to come out now. What do you hope the others' response will be? What would you do if they respond differently than expected? It might not be a good idea to pick the family dinner as the time to come out. This might not be viewed as appropriate by everyone and can have the opposite effect you are looking for. Don't come out to a large group of people and expect it to go well with all of them. Smaller groups or even speaking with people individually will be less stressful to each of you. Once you have come out, you and everyone else will need some time alone to process feelings. Remember, since you want them to listen to you, understand they might need some time to digest this information. Finally, it might be helpful to have handy a list of resources for family members to read so that they can see how others have worked through this issue.