

Coming Out Exercise

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Introduction

This exercise is used to assist individuals with the experience of loss that is often associated with Coming Out. Loss can come in many ways from the loss of a job, the loss of friends and family members, the loss of autonomy, loss of affiliation with others, and so on. This exercise is used to access the vital emotional components of participants' belief and attitude systems in the efforts of creating greater inclusivity in attitude and belief for people who are Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual. In presenting this exercise, it is important to talk first about loss, the dynamics of loss, and the typical types of loss that people who are Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual might experience when coming out. After participants have a good sense of the didactics of loss this exercise is a nice follow-up to assist participants with the important emotional experiences of loss often associated with coming out. It is vital to process this experiential exercise with participants with the end goal of participants understanding an empathic connection to how biphobic/homophobic attitudes and heterosexist beliefs can emotionally affect those individuals who are the targets of these beliefs and attitudes. Allow at least 1 hour for the exercise.

Preparing Stage

Step 1: Ask participants to fold a piece of paper that they have been given into 16 parts and then tear each piece. At the end they will have 16 like-size pieces of paper.

Step 2: Ask participants to break up their 16 pieces of paper into four piles with four pieces of paper in each pile.

Personalizing Stage

Step 3: On the first group of papers participants are to write down the names of four people who are very special, important, and central to their current lives. One name to one piece of paper.

Step 4: On the second group of papers participants are to write down four roles that they currently possess which are very important, special, and central to their current lives. One role to one piece of paper. Roles can be sister, father, student, banker, and so on. Use this prompt only if asked.

Step 5: On the third group, participants are to write down four objects which they possess which are very special, important, and central to their current lives.

Step 6: On the final group, participants are to write down four activities in which they engage which are most important to them.

Experiencing Loss Stage

Step 7: Explain now that loss can come in many forms. The first form is the form of loss that can be predicted. As one is coming out one can often guess that loss is going to occur and can even say that the first set of losses will be here, here, and here, and so on. Ask participants to now look at their piles and pick one piece of paper from each pile that they could do without and tell them to crumple the piece of paper and throw it to the floor. Allow sufficient time for participants to do this.

Step 8: Explain that another form that loss can come in is the form that can be predicted in that loss is going to occur, but in which areas of life the loss will happen can be unpredictable because how people act on their beliefs and attitudes about people who are Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual is often unpredictable. Ask participants to turn their papers over so they cannot see what is written on them, but maintaining the separate piles. Tell them now to pick one paper from each group and without looking to see what it is crumple it and throw it to the floor. Ask participants to not turn the remaining pieces over yet.

Step 9: Explain that loss can also be completely unpredictable and that as one feels one is safe, one can quite easily become unsafe. That as one feels that they have sustained all the loss they can there comes more loss. Some people get lucky and have little to no loss and others are terribly unfortunate and lose everything. People act on their homophobic/biphobic attitudes and heterosexist beliefs in a manner quite often that is blind to the devastation they create. As you are explaining this to participants begin to move among them and take from participants their remaining papers. From some take all, from some take only a few, from some take nothing. With one individual who you might let alone, return to them later and take everything. Take from individuals to match with the types of loss you are speaking about at the time. When you take papers from participants, crumple them and haphazardly throw them aside onto the floor.

Processing Stage

Step 10: Process the reactions individuals have to this exercise and provide understanding to participants' experiences in terms of how their emotional experiences easily match the emotional experiences that people who are Gay, Lesbian, or Bisexual often have in their own Coming Out processes.

Step 11: Questions and end.