



"COMING OUT" STARS BREAKOUT ACTIVITY

Materials Needed: Blue, Purple, Pink, and Green paper stars; and pen/pencils for each participant

Length of time: About 20 minutes, depending on size of group

Size of group: Any

*Let each person pick either a **BLUE, GREEN, PINK, or PURPLE** star and then read the following to them:*

Imagine that this star represents your world, with you in the center and those things or people most important to you at each point of the star. So we'll begin by writing your name in the center of the star, making it your very own star! Then, pick a side of the star to begin with.

Chose a friend who is very close to you. Someone you care about very much. A best friend or a close friend, it doesn't matter. Write their name on this side of the star.

Now, think of a specific family member. Someone that you have always turned to for advice or maybe who knows how to cheer you up when you're sad. A mother, father, spouse/partner... any family member who has made a large impact in your life. Please write their name on the next side of the star.

Next, think of a community that you belong to. It could be a religious community, your neighborhood, a club at work, or just a group of friends. Take the name of this group that you are a part of and write it on the next side of the star moving clockwise.

What job would you most like to have? It could be anything from Director or Head of your branch library, University Librarian, progressing through the ranks, or attaining tenure at your institution. Whatever your career aspiration is, write it on the next side.

Lastly, what are some of your hopes and dreams? Maybe you want to write a book, maybe you want the perfect family. Think of a few of your hopes and dreams and write them on the last side of your star.

*Have everyone stand up in a circle. Explain that each person is now transgender or non-binary/genderqueer and each are about to begin their coming out process. Tell them that they **cannot talk** for the rest of this activity.*

You decide that it will be easiest to tell your friends first, since they have always been there for you in the past and you feel they need to know.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, your friend has no problem with it. They have suspected it for some time now and thank you for being honest with them. Luckily, they act no different toward you and accept you for who you are.

- If you have a **GREEN or PURPLE** star, your friends are kind of hesitant. They are a little irritated that you have waited so long to tell them, but you are confident that soon they will understand that being transgender or non-binary/genderqueer is just a part of who you are ... you just need to give them some time. Please fold back this side of your star.
- If you have a **PINK** star, you are met with anger and disgust. This friend who has been by your side in the past tells you that being transgender or non-binary/genderqueer is wrong and they can't associate with anyone like that. If you have a **PINK** star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground, this friend is no longer a part of your life.

With most of you having such good luck with your friends, you decide that your family, or spouse/partner probably deserves to know. You turn to your closest family member first so that it will be a little easier.

- If you have a **PURPLE** star, the conversation does not go exactly how you planned. Several questions are asked as to how this could have happened, but after some lengthy discussion this person who is close to you seems a little more at ease with it. Fold this side of your star back, as they will be an ally, but only with time.
- If you have a **BLUE** star, you are embraced by this family member. They are proud that you have decided to come out and let you know that they will always be there to support you.
- If you have a **GREEN or PINK** star, your family or member rejects the thought of being related to a person who is transgender or non-binary/genderqueer. Much like some of your friends, they are disgusted and some of you are thrown out of your house or even disowned or divorced. You are now part of the 30% of transgender or non-binary/genderqueer people who have experienced homelessness at some point in their lifetime.¹ If you have a **GREEN or PINK** star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground.

Having told your friends and family, the wheels have started to turn and soon members of your community begin to become aware of your gender identity.

- If you have a **PURPLE or BLUE** star, your gender identity is accepted by your community. They continue to embrace you like anyone else and together you celebrate the growing diversity in your community.
- If you have a **GREEN** star, you are met with a mixed response. Some accept you and some don't know what to think. You remain a part of the community, and with time, will fit in as you once did. If you have a **GREEN** star, please fold back this side.
- If you have a **PINK** star, your community reacts with hatred. They tell you that someone like you doesn't belong in their community. Those who had supported you in your times of need no longer speak to you or acknowledge you. If you have a **PINK** star, tear this side off and drop it to the ground.

You have heard that rumors have started circulating at your library regarding your gender identity. In the past, you have made it a point to confront these rumors as soon as they began, but now you're not sure if that will do more harm than good. But, unfortunately, you don't have the chance.

- If you have a **BLUE** star, your colleagues begin to approach you and let you know that they have heard the rumors and that they don't care, they will support you. Library Executive react the same

way letting you know that you do good work and that's all that matters.

- If you have a **PURPLE** star, your workplace has become quite interesting. Everyone seems to think that you are transgender or non-binary/genderqueer, or perhaps gay or lesbian even though you haven't mentioned it to anyone or confirmed any of the rumors. Some people speak to you less, but the environment has not seemed to change too drastically. If you have a **PURPLE** star, please fold back this side.
- If you have a **PINK or GREEN** star, you continue to work as though nothing is happening, ignoring the rumors that have spread throughout your library. One day, you come in to find that your office has been packed up. You are called into your manager's office and she explains that you are being fired. When you ask why, she tells you that lately your work has been less than satisfactory, and that due to budget cutbacks Library Executive is making changes to staffing levels. You are now part of the 15% of transgender or non-binary/genderqueer people who are unemployed—a rate three times higher than the unemployment rate in the U.S. population,² and of the 30% of whom had a job in the past year and have been fired, denied a promotion, or experienced some other form of mistreatment related to their gender identity or expression.³ If you have a **PINK or GREEN** star, please tear off this side and drop it to the ground.

Now ... your future lies ahead of you as a transgender or non-binary/genderqueer person. Your hopes and dreams, your wishes for the perfect life ... for some of you these are all that remain.

- If you have a **PURPLE, BLUE, or GREEN** star, these hopes and dreams are what keep you going. Most of you have been met with some sort of rejection since beginning your coming out process, but you have managed to continue to live a happy and healthy life. Your personal hopes and dreams become a reality.
- If you have a **PINK** star, you fall into despair. You have been met with rejection after rejection and you find it impossible to accomplish your lifelong goals without the support and love of your friends and family. You become depressed and with nowhere else to turn, many of you begin to abuse drugs and alcohol. Eventually, you feel that your life is no longer worth living. If you have a **PINK** star, please tear it up and drop the pieces to the ground. You are now part of the 40% of transgender or non-binary/genderqueer people who attempt suicide—a rate nearly nine times the attempted suicide rate in the U.S. population (4.6%).⁴

Source: Jeff Pierce, University of Southern California, <https://lgbtrc.usc.edu/files/2015/05/Coming-Out-Stars.pdf>

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NOTES

1. Sandy E. James, et al., *Executive Summary of the Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey (Washington, DC: National Center for Transgender Equality, 2016) 11, <https://transequality.org/sites/default/files/docs/usts/USTS-Executive-Summary- Dec17.pdf>.
2. James, *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, 3.
3. James, *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, 11.
4. James, *2015 U.S. Transgender Survey*, 9.