

COMING OUT TO YOUR PARENTS

by Tom Sauerman

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this pamphlet is to inform gay and lesbian young adults about the process most parents go through when their child's homosexual orientation is disclosed. The stages to be explained are: shock, denial, guilt, expression of feelings, personal decision-making, true acceptance.

The process assumes that you have wrestled with the issue of whether or not to come out to your parents and that your decision is affirmative. The approach and suggestions offered in the following are based on the assumption you suspect one or both of your parents will be understanding, if not supportive, given adequate time. This pamphlet may not be helpful if you have serious reservations about their ability to cope and you suspect they could sever their relationship with you.

A caution: Each family is unique. Although most are likely to follow the stages outlined here, allow some latitude for your own parents. The illustrations and suggestions given here will be drawn from conversations with parents who have attended the Philadelphia Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays meetings. Few parents are "model" cases that perfectly fit the following description.

Knowing what to anticipate and how to respond in a helpful way will enable you to take the big step with some degree of knowledge and support.

PARENTS AND CHILDREN SWITCH ROLES

When you come out to your parents, you may find your parent-child roles reversed for a while. They will need to learn from your experience. As your parents deal with your disclosure, you must assume the 'parenting' role by allowing them time to express their feelings and make progress towards new insights. This will not be easy. You'll want them to understand and grasp this important part of your life right away.