

## COMING OUT STARS

**NOTE: This activity is meant to take more than 20 minutes, so you may need to adapt your training schedule to accommodate using this activity.**

*Give participants their stars at the beginning of the training. Try to distribute the stars evenly by color. Have markers, glitter or other materials gathered so that participants can decorate them. Make sure participants have enough time to decorate their stars at the beginning of the training or right before the activity. The more time and energy a person puts into making their star, the more impactful this activity may be. Instruct participants to only decorate one side of their star. Explain that you will be reading a story to everyone in the audience. Once you have read the story, proceed to the facilitation questions.*

**Explain that later in the activity, participants will not be able to talk for the rest the activity. Stress that if there are any questions, that they need to ask them before this point.**

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.

- Begin by writing your name in the center of the star, making it your very own!
- Choose a friend who is very close to you. Someone that you care about very much. A best friend or a close friend, it doesn't matter. Write their name on a point 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, aunt or grandparent...any family member who has made a large impact in your life. Going clockwise on your star, please write their name on the next point of the star.
- Next, think of a community that you belong to. It could be a religious community, your neighborhood, an organization, student group or just a group of friends. Take the name of that group that you are a part of and write it on the next point of the star
- What job would you most like to have? It could be anything from president to dentist to actor. Whatever your career aspirations are, please write it on the next point.
- Lastly, what are some of your hopes and dreams? Maybe you want to be a millionaire, start a family, travel the world, or give time to charitable causes. Think of a few hopes and dreams and write them on the last point of the star.

**Once complete, have everyone stand up in a circle if possible. Tell participants that they cannot talk for the rest of the activity. Ask if there are any questions before you continue.**

Imagine you are a member of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer community. You are at the beginning of your coming out process and before now, you have been completely closeted, not telling anyone you know about your sexual orientation or gender identity.

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

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- If you have a PINK or a YELLOW 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 LGBTQ is just a part of who you are...you just need to give them some time. Please fold back the point of this star.
- If you have a RED star, you are met with anger and disgust. This friend who has been by your side in the past tells you that being LGBTQ is wrong and they can't associate with anyone like that. If you have a red star, please tear off this point and drop it on 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 probably deserves to know. So, you turn to your closest family member first so that it will be a little easier.

- 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 YELLOW star, the conversation doesn't 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 point of your star back, as they will be an ally, but only with time.
- If you have a PINK or RED star, your family member rejects the thought of being related to a person who is LGBTQ. Much like some of your friends, they are disgusted and some of you are thrown out of your house or even disowned. You are now part of the 42% of the homeless youth who identify as LGBTQ. If you have a PINK or RED star, please tear off this point and drop it on 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 sexual orientation or gender identity.

- If you have a YELLOW or BLUE star, your sexual orientation or 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 PINK star, you are met with a mixed response. Some people 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 PINK star, please fold back this point.
- If you have a RED 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 RED star, tear this point off and drop it on the ground.

You have heard that rumors have started circulating at work regarding your sexual orientation or 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 co-workers begin to approach you and let you know that they have heard the rumors and that they don't care, they will support you. Your bosses react the same way letting you know that you do good work and that is all that matters.
- If you have a YELLOW star, your workplace has become quite interesting. Everyone seems to think that you are LGBTQ, 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 YELLOW star, please fold back this point.
- If you have a RED or a PINK star, you continue to work as though nothing is happening, ignoring the rumors that have spread throughout your workplace. One day, you come in and find that your office has been packed up. You are called into your boss' office and they explain to you that you are being fired. When you ask why, they tell you

that lately your work has been less than satisfactory and that they had to make some cutbacks in your area. If you have a RED or PINK star, please tear off this point and let it drop to the ground.

Now...Your future lies ahead of you as a member of the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer community. Your hopes and dreams, your wishes for the perfect life...for some of you these are all that remain.

- If you have a BLUE, YELLOW, or PINK 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 RED 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 or alcohol. You have thoughts where you feel that your life is no longer worth living. If you have a red star, please tear it up and drop the pieces to the ground. You now represent the 40% of all suicide victims who identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, or queer.

*Modified from: LGBT Resource Center, University of Southern California*

## FACILITATION QUESTIONS

- What are your reactions right now to this exercise? What are you feeling?
- How did your ability to decorate and own your star make you feel?
- Was this a fair activity? How accurate are the situations and scenarios?
- For people with red stars, how did it feel to be rejected time and time again? How might that relate to LGBTQ students?
- How did you feel to have blue stars? Pink or yellow?
- What can we do to make sure our students have fewer “red star” moments? How does being a Safe Zone Ally help that? What is our ethical obligation?

## FACILITATOR OBSERVATIONS

- This activity obviously can have an emotional impact on some people. I thank you for participating.
- It is common that many LGBTQ people have to risk the things that they value most for the chance to be honest with themselves and those around them. The stories of families disowning or kicking out children for identifying as LGBTQ are realistic and fairly frequent. There are cultural components to these scenarios that can also complicate this issue.
- The average age for someone coming out as LGBTQ has now been identified as being 13 years of age. The age has gotten younger and younger over the years as society has slowly become increasingly accepting. Coming out is a process and people may choose to come out in various areas and at different points of their lives. How might this impact the WOU community and what might allies want to keep in mind because of this?