

Bisexuals, gays and lesbians encouraged to come out

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Today is the fourth annual National Coming Out Day. It is the one day of the year lesbian, bisexual and gay people make a special effort to "come out" or reveal their sexual orientation to someone they know.

In our society coming out is an extraordinarily brave step. We must not only overcome society's fears, but our own. We are forced to reveal something that by all rights should be left to our private lives. However, our silence only encourages and contributes to the oppression we experience everyday.

Today, homophobia remains an acceptable bigotry that is legislated by our government and encouraged by our society. In our schools gay

slurs are hardly ever questioned, and in many churches the natural love we feel for each other is declared perverse and sinful.

In a world that is openly hostile toward homosexuals and bisexuals we need support to create the change necessary to enable all of us (gay, bisexual or straight) to realize our potential. It is up to all members of society to combat the ignorance that inhibits individuals from living lives free from fear and violence.

This year on National Coming Out Day, we are encouraging heterosexuals to take this same courageous step and openly affirm their support for the lesbian, bisexual and gay members of our community. Your support is necessary in the fight to free our society from

homophobia and all other "-isms" that suppress our friends, families and future generations.

Support is more than not telling gay jokes. It is more than saying you have an open mind. It goes further than saying you "know a gay person."

It is acknowledging them as an important friend. Being gay positive is confronting people and telling them that you don't appreciate gay slander and homophobic slurs. Being supportive is demanding an end to legalized discrimination based on sexual orientation.

If a brother, sister, parent or friend comes out to you be supportive. Recognize the trust they have placed in you.

If you know someone gay, lesbian or bisexual tell them that you know

it's National Coming Out Day and that you are coming out as a "100 percent Homophobia Free" friend.

It takes a lot of courage to come out as a gay, lesbian or bisexual. But it takes just as much courage for straight people to be visibly supportive.

Come to the "Out Is In" Rally at noon today. Make the extra effort to show support for your friends and family.

As long as we choose to remain hidden, we are our own worst enemy. And as long as we are silent, we are defenseless against oppression.

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