

# HOW WILL I KNOW? INTERPERSONAL DISCLOSURES

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This lesson covers the challenges, opportunities, and concerns involved in coming out or disclosing a hidden identity (e.g. Orientation, HIV Status, Level of Ability, etc.). The activities in this lesson will allow participants to think critically about how to establish networks and resources that can be used to assist in their coming out process.

## KEYWORDS

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Boundaries  
Coming Out  
Communication  
Community  
Emotional  
Intelligence  
HIV Status  
Relationships  
Sexual Health  
Social Supports

## THEME

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Family &  
Relationships

## FORMAT

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Workshop

## TIME

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70 minutes





# PREPARATION

PREPARATION

The facilitator(s) should use this section to prepare for the lesson.

## WHY THIS LESSON IS IMPORTANT FOR BLACK MEN

According to research from the Family Acceptance Project (2010), familial and community acceptance has a positive impact on the self-esteem, social support, and general health status of LGBTQ people. Experiencing support can also help protect LGBTQ individuals against depression, substance abuse, and suicidal ideation and behaviors.

Creating avenues for more social support is especially crucial for black men who have sex with men. Black men who have sex with men have reported that a lack of emotional support from peers, stigma, and internalized homophobia contribute to increases in high-risk sexual behaviors and low medication adherence (*Garcia et al., 2015*). On the other hand, a 2018 study by Shoptaw and Cook found that receiving social support from friends and other loved ones could help protect Black MSM from HIV infection. For black men already living with HIV, close and continuous social support is associated with long-term improvements in mental and HIV-specific health outcomes (*McFadden, 2014*).

Providing supportive environments for black men who have sex with men includes affirming spaces where they can be open to disclose the aspects of themselves that make them who they are. When they feel they must hide their sexual orientation or other aspects of themselves from those they love, they are in greater danger of experiencing mental and physical health challenges. Ultimately, talking with others about one's sexuality, HIV status, or other identities can be a high-anxiety experience; however, discussing these fears and practicing disclosure in a safe learning environment may help Black men find more support in their social networks to the benefit of their overall well-being.

## TIME

<b>STEPS 1–5</b>	Introductions and Opening Activity	20 min.
<b>STEPS 6–11</b>	Panel Discussion or Disclosure Scenario Discussion	25 min.
<b>STEPS 12–16</b>	Practicing Disclosure	15 min.
<b>STEPS 17–20</b>	Closing Activity	10 min.

## GOAL

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Participants will develop a practice of disclosing personal identities that is safe and supports their overall well-being.

## OBJECTIVES

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By the end of this lesson, participants will be able to:

- Name three social, emotional, and/or psychological impacts of living with a hidden aspect of identity.
- Describe three ways that self-disclosure or the lack thereof can affect Black gay men.
- Develop and practice at least one method of personal disclosure.

## KEY TERMS

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**Disclosure:** the act of making something known to someone that was previously unknown.

**Come-out/Coming out:** To openly declare one's sexual orientation (historically affiliated with homosexuality) or to openly declare something about oneself previously kept hidden.

**Same gender loving:** A term originally coined by Cleo Manago that describes people who experience attraction to people of the same gender.

**Gay:** A term of sexual identity/orientation that describes someone who experiences same-sex sexual attraction and behavior.

**Bisexual:** A term of sexual identity/orientation that describes sexual and romantic attraction to people of more than one sex.

**Queer:** A term used to denote people of various non-normative sexual and gender identities who experience cultural marginalization. This term also describes an emerging theoretical model from what has formally been known by lesbian and gay studies.

## REQUIRED BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE FOR EDUCATORS

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This lesson is designed to be facilitated by a peer who can reflect the identities of the men participating (e.g., Black, Same gender attracted/loving, genderfluid, etc.) and relate to experiences with interpersonal disclosure around sensitive and difficult topics. The facilitator should be prepared to direct participants to local mental health resources if discomfort occurs. The facilitator should have a firm grasp of how to present, co-create, and reinforce group norms and community agreements. The facilitator should be able to foster open and honest communication in a group setting and have tolerance for the expression of opposing viewpoints among participants.

## SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS

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This lesson features an optional panel discussion of 3–4 individuals, which should be coordinated by the facilitator prior to the beginning of the session. Panelists can include, but are not limited to, the following types of people:

- Parents of a gay/bisexual/queer young man
- Black Gay/Bisexual/Queer young man that is out about his identity or still has not disclosed their orientation
- A person living with HIV
- A person who has been treated for an STI
- A person who is an undocumented immigrant, or has an undisclosed social status (e.g., mental health or developmental disorder)

All panelists should identify as LGBTQ persons of color, with exception of the parents of an LGBTQ man, in which case it is not required. Panelists should also have a lived experience of personal disclosure that aligns with session content (e.g., recently coming out as LGBTQ, living with HIV, or treated for an STI, revealing their disability or immigrant status) and should feel comfortable sharing their story with a small group. Finally, panelists should be expected to participate for the full panel discussion and follow-up Q & A session.

If the facilitator does not have access to a panel or does not have time to coordinate one, replace the panel activity with Handout H1, “Disclosure Scenario”.

## FACILITATION PREP

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The facilitator(s) should complete the following tasks before the lesson starts:

- ❑ If the space does not allow for lecture style room set ups, arrange chairs in the room in a circle or semi-circle fashion.
- ❑ If there is a co-facilitator, ensure that facilitators are not seated across from one another.
- ❑ During Step 2, participants will be taking time to brainstorm and write. If you have time prior to the session, distribute one sheet of paper and a writing utensil to each participant as they arrive, or place them on each seat in the room.
- ❑ A list of referral sources or services offered within the agency should be readily available for participants at the end of the program.

## MATERIALS

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The facilitator(s) should have the following materials for the lesson:

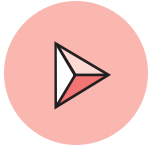
- ❑ Flip chart paper or dry erase board
- ❑ Markers
- ❑ Easel stand (*optional*)
- ❑ Tape (*optional*)
- ❑ Writing utensils (*one for each participant*)
- ❑ Ruled paper (*2–3 sheets per participant*)
- ❑ Post-it Notes or index cards

## HANDOUTS

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Each participant should be provided with the following printed materials:

- ❑ H1, “Disclosure Scenario”  
(*if applicable; see Special Considerations*)
- ❑ End-of-Session Evaluation



# PROCEDURE

The facilitator(s) should follow the steps in this section to facilitate the session, and use the margin for notes and prompts.



## Introductions and Opening Activity

### STEP 1

Welcome participants to your session and conduct brief introductions with the group as needed. Review all established group agreements and reaffirm consent from the group. If group agreements have not been completed, please create them at this time (*use the Community Agreements lesson, if necessary*).

### STEP 2

Offer each participant one sheet of paper and a writing utensil (*if you had time to do this prior to the beginning of the session, ask participants instead to direct their attention to the paper that has already been distributed.*) Explain to the group that you would like them to think about all the various identities they hold in society. As examples, share 2–3 of your own identities, including one or two that may represent a marginalized or hidden status, if you have one (e.g., Black, queer, hidden disability, etc.). Give participants 10 seconds to think of all the various identities they have that come to mind.

### STEP 3

After 10 seconds has passed, instruct participants to create a written list of all the various identities they hold. Explain that this list will eventually be used to help participants introduce each other to the larger group. Instruct them to write as many or as few of them that come to mind and encourage them to push themselves to write any down that may feel uncomfortable to write. Give participants 1–2 minutes to write.

### STEP 4

After about two minutes has passed, instruct participants to partner up with someone else in the room, and share the identities they have written down. Instruct them to share as many or as few items on the list as they wish. Give participants three minutes to share, 1.5 minutes per participant.

#### *Alternate Activity:*

For groups that may not be as familiar with each other, another activity may be used to retain some anonymity while participants get more comfortable. In this version, instruct participants to ball up their completed papers so that they may

have a brief "snowball fight". Instruct participants to toss their paper across the room, and then pick up a different piece of paper. (*Remind them not to reveal it aloud if they happen to pick up their own sheet.*) Instruct participants to now continue through the remainder of the activity as if they are the person whose sheet they now hold.

**STEP 5**

After about three minutes, **reconvene** the larger group. Beginning with a volunteer, **instruct** each participant to introduce their partner, using their name, pronouns, and identities shared. After all participants have introduced someone else, **review** the following Discussion Questions:

1. "How was that exercise? How did it feel to think of your various identities, and then share those with someone else in the room?"
2. "How did it feel to share someone else's identities with others?"
3. "Did you notice similarities in the discussion, or differences? If so, what?"
4. "Are their aspects of ourselves (e.g., race, gender) that could make sharing or not sharing easier or more difficult?" (*If yes, solicit examples.*)
5. "This is a session/discussion about the concept of disclosure. Does this activity help us think clearly about the topic and what it means? If so, how? If not, what more do you think would help us get there?" (*If needed, share the definition for Disclosure noted in the Key Terms section of this lesson.*)

**Panel Discussion**

*For this particular exercise, facilitators should have previously invited a panel of 2–4 individuals to discuss the topic of the lesson (see Special Considerations in the Preparation section of this lesson). If there will be no panel discussion, skip to Step 9.*

**STEP 6**

**Explain** to participants now that they will be hearing stories from individuals who have had experiences of needing to disclose, or "come out" to someone an aspect of their identity, have someone disclose an identity to them, or manage a hidden identity. **Encourage** participants to listen to each panel speaker, taking notes for any questions they may wish to ask once they are done.

**STEP 7**

Allow each panelist 5–7 minutes to share their disclosure story. Allow participants to either have 3–5 minutes after each panelist to ask questions, or 10 minutes after all panelists have spoken (*If you are concerned about the questions that may be asked, you may instruct participants to write their questions first on a Post-it Note or index card, and then submit them to the facilitator for review before being asked.*). If no questions are offered by the group, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. What has been the biggest change since you disclosed this aspect of yourself? (*For parents of an LGBTQ man, invite them to consider what it has been like to share with other friends and family.*)
2. What do you know now, after disclosing, that you wish you knew before disclosing?
3. What have you found to be the benefits and/or consequences of disclosure?
4. What advice would you give to someone that is struggling with “Coming out”?

**STEP 8**

After the Q&A portion of the session has completed, adjourn the panelist group. If needed, allow the group 3–5 minutes of additional intra-group discussion before proceeding through the rest of the session.

Skip to Step 12.



### Alternate Exercise: Disclosure Scenario Discussion

**STEP 9**

Distribute a copy of Handout H1, “Disclosure Scenario” to each participant. (*If you have a larger group, you may also choose to break them into smaller groups of 3–5 people.*) Instruct participants to read the scenario silently to themselves or lead the group in reading the scenario out loud (popcorn style, round robin, taking volunteers, etc.).



**STEP 10**

After the scenario has been read, proceed through the following Discussion Questions:

1. What do you see as opportunities for individuals to disclose in this scenario? *(If it is helpful to the group, write all responses down on a sheet of flip chart paper or the dry erase board.)*
2. Which disclosures do you feel need to happen if Mateo and Jordan have a second date?
3. Are there disclosures can wait? If so, which ones, and why? Would any circumstances change your answers?
4. What are some of the potential benefits and consequences of Jordan disclosing his identities and communities?
5. What are some of the potential benefits and consequences of Mateo disclosing their identities and communities? In the short-term? In the long-term?

**STEP 11**

Invite participants to offer any final thoughts or comments about the disclosure scenario, and then move on.



### Practicing Disclosure

**STEP 12**

Explain to participants that in everyone's story, there is always a series of action steps that leads someone to disclose parts of someone to themselves. If it has not already been mentioned, explain to participants that for most people, disclosing a hidden identity is considered a personal process, and will look different depending on the environment, identity being disclosed, and person receiving the disclosure. Encourage participants to consider that disclosing a hidden identity is a personal decision and should be done in a time frame that is comfortable for the individual.

**STEP 13** **Instruct** participants to now consider the steps that may be involved in choosing to disclose a hidden identity or status to someone. **Explain** that they should use this mental list to establish a sample plan for disclosing a hidden identity about themselves to someone else. **Instruct** participants to select an identity from either their original list created at the beginning of the session, or any other identity they have not yet discussed.

**STEP 14** **Distribute** two sheets of paper to each participant, then **give** them 5–7 minutes to create their plan. **Instruct** participants to identify at least one person they will “come out” to and one hidden identity, encouraging them to consider selecting people and identities that may not feel easy to share. **Instruct** participants to work silently and by themselves, asking questions for clarification as needed.

*Alternate Exercise:*

If you completed the Disclosure Scenario Discussion, you may also instruct participants to develop a plan or script for how the characters in that scenario might disclose aspects of themselves to the other. This can be done individually or in small groups. Give participants 5 minutes to create their plan or script.

**STEP 15** After 5–7 minutes, **reconvene** the larger group, and then **invite** participants to share any, or all, action steps from their plan. (*Before they begin, clearly **note** that sharing responses is optional and not mandatory.*) If there are no participant volunteers, **ask** the group to brainstorm any steps they feel can be incorporated in the “coming out” process. Include any or all the following:

- Writing a list of people that are closest to you
- Identifying any upcoming events or days that may be safe opportunities for coming out
- Identify key points ready to help get the message out
- Identifying any immediate and/or future needs you may have of the person you will be coming out to (whether physical or socioemotional)
- Have a self-care plan in place for after the meeting

**STEP 16** Invite participants to ask any remaining questions they may have, and then prepare to conclude the session.



### Closing Activity

**STEP 17** Close the session by thanking the participants for their honesty and vulnerability. If you are able, offer to stay around for a bit longer if anyone has any questions or would like to talk further about their experience.

**STEP 18** Distribute a copy of the End-of-Session Evaluation to each participant. Allow participants 5–7 minutes to complete the evaluation, and collect them as they are completed. After five minutes, invite any participants who have not completed the evaluation to do so after the next activity.

**STEP 19** Ask each participant to name one thing they are glad to have learned in this session, and one thing they will continue to think about after they leave.

**STEP 20** Once everyone has shared, thank the participants for participating and then adjourn the session.



## HANDOUT

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### DISCLOSURE SCENARIO

Jordan is a 29-year-old Black gay man. Jordan lives with his partner of three years. Jordan and his partner practice polyamory and often date other people together and separately. Jordan currently has another boyfriend who he has been with for about 7 months. Jordan has not shared this part of his life with his family and most of his friends; he finds it easier for people to think he is monogamous with his long-term partner. Jordan is out as gay to his family, friends, and co-workers. Jordan has also been living with HIV for almost 8 years. He takes his medications as prescribed, goes to regular doctor's visits, uses condoms, and talks with his partners openly about his status before sex. Jordan's long-term partner and boyfriend are HIV-Negative and take PrEP to manage their risk. Jordan has not talked about his HIV status with anyone other than sexual partners and healthcare providers.

Mateo is a 32-year-old Latinx Queer person who worked with Jordan at a restaurant last year. In the last two months, after several months of processing in therapy, Mateo came out to a few close friends as gender non-conforming and queer. For the most part, it was a positive experience, but one of Mateo's friends has become really distant since then and doesn't seem to have any time to hang out anymore. Mateo is attracted to people of all genders and has recently started adopting they/them pronouns with the close friends who are supportive of them. Mateo has had a couple sexual encounters with men but has spent most of their life presenting and passing as straight and cisgender to friends, family members, and other partners. Because Mateo carries undocumented immigrant status in the United States, they also prefer to wear masculine clothes, keep their hair short, and maintain a short beard, so as not to draw unwanted negative attention.

A couple of weeks ago, Jordan ran into Mateo on the street. The two decided to get coffee that day and catch up. They talked about Jordan's search for a new job, mutual friends, and Mateo's trip to Florida to see some family who recently moved to the States from Colombia. They had a great time and both felt a sense of attraction and chemistry that was not there before. Two days after that, Jordan asked Mateo on a date.