“Coming out” is when a person tells someone else that he or she is gay, lesbian, bisexual, or transgender. Someone who is coming out feels close enough to you and trusts you enough to be honest and risk losing you as a friend. What can you do to support your friend? Here are some suggestions that you may wish to consider:

- Thank your friend for having the courage to tell you. Choosing to tell you means that your friend respects and trusts you.

- Respect your friend’s confidentiality. It might take a while until he or she is ready to tell others. This should be done on your friend’s time schedule.

- Tell your friend that you still care for him or her. Be the friend you have always been. The main fear for people coming out is that they will be rejected by their friends and family.

- Do not say, “Are you sure?” When people come out to you, it most likely means that they have gone over this question thousands of times in their own mind, and they are sure!

- If your friend is transgender, try to support him or her by using the name and pronoun (“he,” “she,” or “ze”) that your friend prefers. If your friend wants a particular name and pronoun to be used by others, try to help other people to respect your friend’s desired name and pronoun.

- It’s okay if you feel uncomfortable or upset. You can say that you may need some time to feel comfortable but this does not mean that you are no longer his or her friend.

- Don’t shy away from bringing up issues around sexual orientation or gender identity, but remember that you can still talk about the topics you always talked about, whether these are music, movies, politics, or other subjects.

- Learn about organizations and publications – either GLB/Trans and/or Jewish – that might provide support to your friend. It might be important for your friend to know that such support exists.

- Don’t assume that your friend is attracted to you. It is a myth that gay, lesbian, and bisexual people are attracted to everyone who is of the same sex.

- Don’t assume that your friend who is transgender will automatically be attracted to the same sex as the gender with which your friend identifies. For example, a friend who was raised as a girl but who identifies as a boy may be attracted to boys, girls, or both and may identify as gay, straight, or bisexual.

- It’s never too late. If someone has come out to you before and you feel badly about how you handled it, you can always go back and try again.

Adapted by Kim Westheimer from a flyer by the Youth Service Bureau of Wellington, Ottawa.