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# Expressing Our Needs

## Coming-out for Transsexuals & Transvestites

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Sharing our gender and sexuality issues with people close to our hearts can be intimidating

When we think of

communications, many thoughts may come to mind. Conversing on the telephone, chatting

through computer modems, speaking to friends and family, or even our own gender leaders educating a group of budding psychologists, all these are different forms of communication. As individuals experiencing various levels of gender issues and self-awareness, we often find ourselves becoming more in touch with our feelings and needs. Equally important to discovering new levels of self, is sharing the discoveries we have made, so that we may enrich our experiences and fulfil our newly identified needs.

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'Coming-out' can be a powerful experience, often serving as a catalyst in revealing our special secret self, while at the same time, improving our overall

communication skills. Sharing our gender and sexuality issues with people close to our hearts can be intimidating. In our pre-established relationships, i.e., family, partners and close friends, we often become comfortable in speaking about daily needs and occurrences.

Often, overlooking communication as an important tool which cements our relationships together, at times assuming that those individuals "know what our needs may be". In revealing important issues, like coming-out, we deal with the focus being directly aimed at us. We may draw on the fear of "I may be rejected", or "I feel a lot of shame surrounding this issue". Hence, we perceive 'Coming-Out', like other communication challenges, as risky business.

In revealing deeply important issues, such as coming-out, one guideline therapist Roger Peo endorses is the fundamental question, "Will this improve my relationship with this person?". This is an excellent measure in determining necessity versus risk.

Revealing our needs has always been a risky business. There are, however, a number of tools we can use in minimizing risk, which are illustrated in the following:

- **Prepare for communicating:** Much like going to a business meeting, it can be helpful to prepare a list of items you wish to discuss. Also, talking with a knowledgeable friend or counsellor can be helpful. Dan, our imaginary person, is about to tell his wife, Karen, about his gender issues. Dan first spoke with his therapist about his feelings, then strategized a communications plan, and finally, he defined a level of confidentiality to request from Karen.
- **Make an appointment:** Making an appointment was the first thing Dan did by asking Karen whether she would feel comfortable talking personally over dinner.
- **Validating the relationship:** Validating the relationship is an important door opener. It reaffirms that the relationship and its positive strengths exist. Dan stated, "Karen, I want you to know I've drawn a great deal of happiness from our eight years of marriage. What I have to share is very personal and I feel I can trust sharing it with you". Dan also sought a confidentiality agreement at this time.
- **Relieve stress by revealing:** Just about now, our imaginary character is starting to sweat a little. Like many great communicators, he found that by telling Karen he was feeling a little nervous, he had put Karen in an empathetic mood. Feeling comfortable, he now can move on.
- **Share the facts:** "Karen, I'm a cross-dresser and even have thought of having a sex change". There, Dan did it! He then continued to reveal the facts he knew about himself, gender issues ... all the time respectfully answering Karen's questions. He also, referred questions he didn't know to a future discussion.
- **Affirming the other person's beliefs and feelings:** Affirming the other person's beliefs and feelings can be our most empowering step. It is at this point, that we may not hear what we want. Dan followed this

by listening while Karen expressed reservations about his cross-dressing around their children. He told Karen he would talk to his therapist to see if cross-dressing around children was harmful.

- **Sealing the communication:** Like any good communication, it's important to have a proper closing. Karen had stated, "I'm not very happy about this, and there is a lot I don't understand, although I am willing to learn more without passing judgement". In closing Dan thanked Karen for being there for him, while restating, that he valued his relationship with her, and then gave her a warm hug.

Communicating individual needs, like gender and sexuality issues, won't always be this easy. However, you have just reviewed some powerful tools that you may include in your communications repertoire. With practice, as you increase your communication skills, you will find an increased sense of empowerment and satisfaction. Do remember, after sharing something as stressful as 'coming-out', you may be well-served by spending time alone, positively reflecting on your personal success ... and if you wish, rewarding yourself in a special way.

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