

Guided Imagery of LGB Issues

Adapted from the original by Marc Gunning and GAYNET, 1991.

Make sure your audience is ready for this exercise — it is very emotional. Before presentation begins, each participant is handed six index cards/scrap of paper. The facilitator then reads the following paragraph and proceeds with the cards. This exercise is a lot of reading so practice out loud first and then pace yourself. If possible, use a room where you can dim the lights a little bit. Also, some facilitators choose to make a loud banging sound against the wall for the last scenario. It can be very dramatic and also upsetting so choose for yourself what feels right.

On the six cards/pieces of paper that have been handed out to you, please write a name, word or phrase which fits the following categories. Please use a separate card for each category and keep them in the order I ask them of you.

1. A person from your childhood with whom you shared secrets (ages 6 or 7).
2. The names of your best friends in grade school.
3. A small valued material possession from your early teenage years, which you used to keep in your locker.
4. Your favorite public you go and hang out now in college.
5. A person who is very close to you now.
6. A goal or dream you have for your future.

Now, I want you to get in a comfortable position. You can sit or lie on the floor or stay in or stay in your chairs. As you undertake this imaginary journey, think about the cards in your hand and consider the personal meaning of what you have written. Get in a comfortable position, close your eyes, take a deep breath ... exhale.

I am going to ask you to put aside something that is very important to you. What I am asking you to put aside momentarily are your memories. I am asking you to suspend your reality and call upon the wonderful gift of imagination. Your imagination is the key instrument in this exercise of guided imagery. We will be taking a chronological journey through your mind's eye of what your life might have been if you were gay. You may experience a variety of feelings as you take this tour. Allow yourself to examine your feelings, but try not to let your feelings distract you from participating in this exercise. Please realize that my intent is not to manipulate your feelings or to change who you are. The goal is to help you understand some of the feelings and experiences of someone who is lesbian, gay or bisexual. The experiences that I am about to take you through are not universal for all lesbian, gay or bisexual people, but some of the themes presented are somewhat common.

Let's go back to your early childhood. Choose an age at which you have your earliest consistent memories. Perhaps you'll be five, six or seven. You are sitting in front of the television set watching a show. One of the characters, Chris, a person about your age who is the same gender as you and is on T.V. This character is your favorite and one of the main reason why you watch this particular show. You feel drawn to Chris. You want to be Chris' best friend. You turn to someone that you have always shared secrets with and you say, "I love Chris." "Chris is the greatest!"

That person makes a face at you and says, "That's disgusting. People shouldn't feel that way; my Daddy says so." You are confused and ashamed. *(Pause)* Hold up the card with the name of the person with whom you shared secrets. You no longer feel that you can talk about your inner most feelings with this person. Crumple it up and toss it aside. *Pause a moment to allow people to crumple us and toss their cards.*

You are now eleven years old and in grade school. Your teacher takes you and your classmates to the bathroom. As always, the teacher stays right outside the door and tells everyone, "Hurry up! Hurry up!" You wonder why you and your classmates are always being rushed out of the bathroom. Of course, no one really has to go to the bathroom, so you and your friends get together and talk about other people in your class. Someone starts talking about how cute another classmate of an opposite gender is. Everyone else agrees on how great this classmate looks and everyone seems to be very interested in this classmate.

You, however, are not interested. You feel uncomfortable and out of place. Someone in the group laughs a little too loud and the teacher rushes in to see what's going on. The discussion ends and you head back to the classroom feeling alone and isolated. You know that you are different from your friends and you feel like no one will understand. You don't even understand your feelings. You want to talk about them but you know you can't. *(Pause)* Hold up the card with the names of your best friends, you no longer feel as close to them as you once did. Crumple it up and toss it aside. *Pause a moment to allow people to crumple up and toss their cards.*

You're now fourteen. You've been looking forward to high school. You think that things will be different, that you will make a lot of new friends, and that you won't feel so isolated anymore. You avoid looking too closely at the classmates whom you feel attracted to. You don't want them to call you the names you've been hearing for so long: "FAG!" "QUEER!" "DYKE" "LESBO!" You don't want people to think that you are gay. You heard about how weird gay people are from your parents, friends, and religious leaders in the community. Most of the gay people you've ever seen on television were villains or being killed or just plain stupid. You don't know what you are, but you know you can't be gay. You tell yourself that it's "just a phase" and that you'll soon grow out of it.

One day, while in line for lunch, you forget yourself and you stare at someone whom you find very attractive. Someone sees you looking and calls you "QUEER!" It's starting all over again: the names, the hatred, the feelings of worthlessness. Later, you go back to your locker and you find that someone has broken into it and thrown ketchup all over your books. You find a note saying: "All gays should die." One of your most prized possessions that you kept in your locker has been completely destroyed. You feel like the whole world hates you and you wonder why this had to happen to you. You think that things would maybe be better if you were just dead. You've been thinking of suicide a lot lately, but you're too scared to do it. *(Pause)* Hold up the card with your prized possession - it is gone forever. Crumple it up and toss it aside. *Pause a moment to allow people to crumple up and toss their cards.*

You're now eighteen in college, and after years of hoping, praying, wishing and struggling, you've come to realize that you really are gay. It's not just a phase. It's not something that you choose. It's who you are. You've just met someone named Terry, who is like you. This person is fairly open and seems to be happy about being gay. You talk with Terry about your feelings and innermost desires. Finally, you've met someone who understands — someone who knows that you're not evil, sick or demented.

You feel attracted to Terry and you want to get to know Terry better. There's a place that you love to go to hang out, so you suggest that you and Terry meet there later. You arrive early and wait with anticipation and excitement - this is your first real date. Terry arrives and you want to hug Terry. You start to when you notice a look of panic on Terry's face. You realize that other people are around and that they are looking at you and Terry suspiciously. You both feel very awkward and uncomfortable there and you quickly decide to leave. *(Pause)* Hold up the card with the name of your favorite place — you no longer feel comfortable there. Crumple it up and toss it aside. *Pause a moment to allow people to crumple up and toss their cards.*

You are twenty one years of age today. Someone who is very close to you decides to treat you to dinner to celebrate your birthday. Dinner was wonderful, the food was great, the atmosphere was comfortable, and you both did some reminiscing about the past. You both laughed a lot and you have come to realize how important this person is to you, and you no longer want to keep this part of your life a secret from him or her. You've decided that the first chance tonight, you're going to tell this person that you are gay.

Soon, the opportunity presents itself. You start out by telling this person how important he or she is to you and that there is something you have wanted to tell him or her for a long time. Finally, you say it, "I'm gay." The person looks back at you for a second and says nothing. He or she finally says, "Well that's okay. You're still my friend." But something seems different now. There's an awkward silence and this person obviously feels uncomfortable. You try and break the tension with a joke, but it doesn't work. This person is looking at you as if you were a total stranger and you feel like the bond has been broken. *(Pause)* Hold up the card with the name of the person who is close to you — you no longer feel close to him or her. Crumple it up and toss it aside. *Pause a moment to allow people to crumple up and toss their cards.*

You have graduated college and you are ready to enter the real world. You've just been hired for a job that you are very excited about; you start immediately. You feel pretty good about yourself.

You've made it through the tough times, yet you have a healthy outlook on who you are and what you can accomplish. You are now proud of being gay. Your pride comes not solely by virtue of your sexuality, but also that you are a survivor in the wake of oppression and prejudice. You've been able to unlearn many of the lies and distortions about what it means to be gay. You think about your goals and your dreams and you feel like some day you will be able to achieve them.

Later that evening, you meet some friends at your favorite club. You want to celebrate your good fortune. You all have a few drinks and a few laughs. You decide to leave a little earlier than everyone else, because you want to be ready for your new job tomorrow morning. You say good-bye to everyone and walk through the parking lot. Three men step out of a nearby car and approach you. They have objects in their hands. One of them says, "Say good-bye queer bait," "You don't deserve to live freak!" and swings the object at you. BANG! *(Pause)* Now hold up the card with your hopes and dreams. They are gone forever. Crumple it up and toss it aside. *Pause a moment to allow people to crumple up and toss their cards.*

Processing:

Let the silence extend for a few seconds. As you facilitate, try to get several students to share for each question. If there is common theme, then ask if someone has something different to say. You want to give time and space for multiple perspectives to come out. When someone makes a broad statement about the exercise or homosexuality, then ask the group for their thoughts about it. This way, the group facilitates their own learning of this issue instead of it all coming from you. The following order of questions unfolds nicely but feel free to edit as you see fit.

Also, this exercise does not make any statement about the reality or goodness or anything about gayness. So, if anyone says, "I don't believe in homosexuality, so this exercise didn't apply." Or "I'm not gay so I couldn't relate." You can respond: "Homosexuality's existence is not part of this exercise. We're trying to show how Homophobia impacts real people. This exercise calls upon your ability to use your imagination, a skill I know you all possess."

Take a moment to take a deep breath and exhale. When you are ready, open your eyes. I'd like to hear from a few of you just what you are feeling right now. (If they go off on discussion, gently bring them back to focusing on their feelings).
Which card was the hardest for you to crumple up and throw away? Why?

Can you imagine kids in elementary school responding that way? What were your classmates like in your elementary school?
What about students in junior high school? Can you imagine this happening? Why or why not? And high school?

What about students in college? How accepting do you perceive this campus to be for GLBT people? Has anyone seen or heard homophobic things?

What was it like for you to imagine your life this way and experience this kind of loss?

How do you think the real people in your life would really react if you told them you were gay? Who would stick by you? Who would judge you? Who would just fade away?

Have you ever had a friend come out to you? What was that like?

How does this activity relate to our campus or your life as a college student?

Finally, close by stating the following:

I first want to thank you all for being willing to take the risks that were asked of you tonight. That made all the difference for the benefit of this opportunity to explore these issues. Second (if this happened), I want to acknowledge that some of you came out tonight and that is a very courageous. I also want to state that the rest of us will hold that in complete confidence. That just because you felt safe enough to share that with us tonight, you have not given any of us permission to discuss it with others. Third, I want to encourage you to continue to notice and explore these topics on your own. Pay attention to how heterosexism and homophobia play out in your daily lives, and more importantly, what you do to participate in supporting its continuance in our society.”