



## Coming Out in the Military

In the eight years since “don’t ask, don’t tell” was lifted, gay men and women have been free to live openly while serving in the military. The former policy called for immediate discharge of service members who did not hide their homosexuality. Also, two years ago, the ban on openly transgender service members was repealed.

But even with the immediate risk of discharge gone, some lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) service members may be reluctant to come out to their superiors and fellow military members. If the uncertainty distresses an LGBT service member under your care, here are some ways to help.

- **Find out about the service member’s concerns.** These may include fear of rejection or harassment. Help her think through and prepare for possible negative reactions.
- **Talk about the potential benefits of living openly.** Members of the LGBT community including those in the military—report that being open about their sexual orientation or gender identity lifts their self-esteem and allows them to live a fuller life. It also can lead to closer and richer relationships with others. When they no longer carry the burden of hiding a secret, they have the energy to refocus attention on other aspects of life, like their job, interests, and goals.
- **Suggest the service member come up with a plan.** He may want to come out to one trusted Person or to a few members of his unit. The service member may repeat this scenario several times as he moves into different military assignments, so discuss other possible strategies. For Example, the service member may decide to simply live his life as an openly gay man without “coming out” to others about it.
- **Encourage the service member to join an LGBT support group.** Some installations host gay-straight alliances and similar groups.
- **If the service member is harassed or experiences discrimination, encourage her to file a complaint with her command.** Sexual orientation is protected under the Military Equal Opportunity policy.



Many openly LGBT service members say their fellow service members have been very accepting of them. This may be in part because of the diverse nature of the military, which is made up of people from different backgrounds, races, and ethnicities.

Service members also tend to form strong bonds because they must rely on one another in potentially life-threatening situations. In the midst of conflict, a person's sexuality or gender identity is unlikely to matter.

*If you are interested in providing non-medical counseling to military service members and their families through Military OneSource, please email us at [mosproviderrelations@militaryonesource.com](mailto:mosproviderrelations@militaryonesource.com).*